A Parisian Sultana

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A SON OF SWEDEN.

FROM THE GERMAN OF

VAN DER VELDE,

BY

CHRISTINA TYRRELL,

Translator of Werner's "Success, and How He Won It," "Under a Charm," &c.

2 Vols., 21/.

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A PARISIAN SULTANA:

A TRANSLATION OF

ADOLPHE BELOT'S

"La Sultane Parisienne."

BY

H. MAINWARING DUNSTAN.

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BOOK II.

IN THE HEART OF AFRICA.

A PARISIAN SULTANA.

CHAPTER I.

In a few moments the little European flotilla was rounding the Ras-el-Khartoum, the junction of the White and Blue Niles, and very soon it passed the three large mimosas, called usually the "tree," the rendezvous for all boats leaving for the voyage up the White Nile or its affluents. The banks of the river here and for some miles farther on present a most monotonous appearance—low, flat banks as far as the eye can see, often flooded and resembling a sea rather than a river, with here and there a clump of acacias. In the distance can be discerned the desert with its sandy undulations. From the bed of the river snags and dead stumps of trees raise their withered heads, whilst aquatic plants glide slowly down the stream and look like floating islets of verdure. Clouds of mosquitoes swarm on this moving vegetation and appear so thoroughly satisfied with their habitation that they forget to attack the European traveller.

The captain of the steamer which towed the flotilla was a young Egyptian officer, educated in Paris, a very gentlemanly and clever man. At starting he had begged Madame de Guéran and her companions to come on board his ship. "In a few days," he said, "you will leave me, for you will go up the Gazelle River whilst I shall have to proceed alone on my journey up the White Nile as far as Gondokoro. Give me, then, as long as you can, the pleasure of your society."

The whole party acceded to this invitation, and joined the "Khedive," that being the name of the steamer. Most of their time was passed on the poop, and the conversation frequently turned on the slave-trade, which the young officer had for two years, under the command of Sir Samuel Baker, endeavoured to put down.

"Alas!" he said, "our efforts have been well nigh futile. For one cargo of slaves released by us ten have escaped, and General Baker was worn out, during his four years' of command, in the struggle against the natives of the country, whom the slave-merchants, Aboo-Saoud, the most powerful of all amongst them, incited to oppose him."

One evening, as the Europeans and their host were chatting in some such fashion as we have described, an acrid, fetid stench, more like the smell of a charnel-house or a wild beasts' den than anything else, was wafted by the wind to-

wards the "Khedive," and unexpectedly saluted the nostrils of her passengers.

"This is awful," said Delange, "these banks are enough to breed a pestilence."

"No," said the Captain, "this foul stench comes from that large boat you see coming down the river towards us. If I am not mistaken I shall find on board her some living arguments in support of what I have just been telling you about the slave trade and our powerlessness to put an end to it."

The officer, whilst saying this, got up and directed the engines to be stopped. A boat was at the same time lowered and pulled towards the stranger with an order for her to heave to.

No notice was taken of the command, and the boat, borne onwards by the strength of the rapid current and the favourable wind, continued on her course, the "Khedive" being unable to bar her passage. On the contrary, the Captain prudently got out of the way with his flotilla, but as soon as the sailing boat had passed he fired a gun as a second notice to stop, and this was at once answered by the lowering of her huge sail, those on board recognizing the fact that they were not strong enough to make any show of continued resistance.

"The sky is beautifully clear, and the moon will soon rise from behind that leafy screen of mimosas," said the Captain to his guests. "Would you like to come on board that boat

with me? I have every reason to believe that we shall find something in her which will repay us for our trouble."

The offer was accepted, and, a few moments afterwards, a couple of boats were pulled alongside the starboard gangway of the steamer. Ten well-armed sailors took their place in the first, and in the other the Captain, Madame de Guéran, Miss Poles, and their three companions seated themselves.

Five minutes sufficed to reach the stranger. Contrary to expectation there was no attempt at a parley, nor was any opposition offered to this nocturnal visit. So far, indeed, was this from being the case that a line was thrown out to the boats to make them fast to the vessel's side.

The Egyptian officer, followed by his sailors and the European travellers, had scarcely climbed up the side, when the Captain, or reis, a man of about forty, in Mussulman costume, advanced towards them. He spoke in Turkish, and addressed himself to the Commander of the "Khedive," whose uniform bespoke his rank.

"As soon as I understood your orders," said he, in a low voice and with a smile on his thin parched lips, "I hastened to obey them. You have, no doubt, some despatches to give me for Khartoum, which I shall reach in two days if the wind continues favourable."

"You are not going to Khartoum, where you

would get into trouble," replied the Commander of the "Khedive." "You reckon upon heaving to at some point along the banks where you can discharge your cargo of slaves, whom you will afterwards forward by land, westwards by Kordofan, or eastwards by Sennaar, to some market or other, either in the interior or on the coast."

"My cargo of slaves, sir? What are you talking about?" exclaimed the Mussulman, raising his eyes to heaven as if to summon it to bear witness to his veracity, "I am a straightforward trader, and I am on my way back from the Gazelle River with a cargo of ivory from the Southern provinces."

"Where is your cargo?" asked the officer.

"Here are a few samples?" replied the Turk, pointing to a number of elephants' tusks which were strung up along the mast.

"You have made a dangerous trip solely for ivory, have you?" was the Egyptian's reply. "I know you and your kindred spirits too well to be taken in by any such tale as that. Where have you hidden your human merchandize? Answer."

"Nowhere, I assure you, sir. You may search the ship if you like."

"That is exactly what I am going to do."

"When you please."

The Egyptian officer was beginning to feel nonplussed. In vain he looked around him,

he could only discover about eight or ten men, rather a villainous-looking lot truly, doing odd jobs about the ship.

In the meantime, the stench, which had first become noticeable about half an hour previously, appeared now to increase in intensity every moment, and whiffs of hot, one might almost say putrified, air surged up without intermission from somewhere or other. Whence could possibly come these foul exhalations, this suffocating heat, which seemed to emanate from some cribb'd, cabined, and confined human herd? If the vessel had been a slaver in the Indian Ocean or the Red Sea, there would not have been any need for hesitation. The removal of the hatches would have at once exposed to view two or three hundred blacks, chained along the side of the hold, or stowed away in the centre like bales of cotton or hogsheads of sugar. But the large boat, on board which they were, drew but little water, and she had not depth enough for either a hold or a lower deck.

Fortunately, the sailors of the "Khedive," were whiling away the time by making a tour of inspection on their own behalf, and some of them, who had made their way forwards, took it into their heads to remove some very suspicious looking sacks of grain, thereby uncovering a trap-door which they set to work to raise.

As soon as the men on board, who had up to this time remained remarkably indifferent and

impassive, saw what their Egyptian colleagues were about, they came forward and endeavoured to prevent them from satisfying their curiosity. A hot argument ensued, and the attention of the European party was attracted by the wordy tumult. They at once hastened to join the sailors, and, summoning the reis, ordered him to have the trap raised. But the fellow, though previously obsequious and pliant enough, suddenly put on an arrogant air and refused to give the required orders, his crew, at the same time, taking up a menacing attitude.

"All right," said the Commander of the "Khedive," "I expected this, and have provided for the emergency."

So saying, he put his silver whistle to his lips, and at the shrill, prolonged call, the Egyptian steamer, which had been awaiting the signal, was set in motion and came near. The warning was enough, and the Captain, followed by his crew, withdrew aft.

The trap was then raised, and a glimpse was caught of a huge black, seething, writhing, swarming hole. It was but a glimpse, for those who looked in were glad to draw back, half stifled by the heat and stench which escaped from the pit.

At once hands, arms, shoulders, heads appeared through the various openings, and laboured gasps were heard from surcharged breasts, eagerly drinking in the pure air. Sighs

and stifled cries from the belly of the ship added to the general discordance.

"Come along!" exclaimed M. de Morin, "let us rescue these poor creatures."

He, his companions, and the Egyptians approached the trap and set to work to haul up all the arms, shoulders, and heads within their reach, seizing hold of them, and dragging them out with such good-will that in a few minutes a score of slaves, more or less suffocated, were lying on the deck, able at last to breathe. But the newly-opened den contained other victims, who must be saved if, indeed, help had not arrived too late. A sailor handed a torch to MM. de Morin and Périères, and the two friends were courageous enough to descend into the abyss.

There, in a space about fifteen metres long, the whole length of the boat, and five wide, in a sort of gallery, where a man even sitting down had to lower his head, in a kind of double-bottomed box, were a hundred human creatures, boys, girls, and women, crammed together, huddled, heaped up pell-mell, welded, as it were, into one another.

"Now, then!" called out M. de. Morin, who was anxious to get on deck again. "Stir yourselves, and get out of this!"

But the poor wretches did not stir. They were not quite so numerous as they had been a moment before, a breath of air had reached

them—they did not ask for more—and they called to mind the threat that was held over them when they were shut up in that den—their persecutors had sworn that they would never open the living tomb if their victims uttered a single cry, or drew attention to the boat.

It is owing to the dread instilled into these poor people, ground down by misery and want, and, above all, is it owing to this hideous hiding-place on board their vessels, that the slave dealers continue to carry on, in spite of Baker, their nefarious trade, and sail, unsuspected, past the very stations organized for their discovery. As a rule, their slaves remain on deck night and day, but as soon as a station is neared, or a man-of-war is signalled in the distance, the wretches are made to go below at once into the confined space we have described. There they are hermetically enclosed, there they are immured, not to be released until all danger has disappeared. An opening here and there in the vessel's side, just above the water-mark and too small to be seen, enables the inmates to struggle against suffocation for, perhaps, an hour. That limit passed, the deaths are about twenty a minute, the strongest, those who need a larger quantum of air for their spacious lungs, being the first to succumb. The weak and ailing alone exist for any length of time, and so, at the end of a couple of hours, there is no

longer any hurry to open the trap, for out of it would only come worthless, valueless slaves.

But if the openings, of which we have spoken, are not large enough to prevent suffocation, they still allow the escape of the miasma produced by this compressed, over-heated human mass. The wind had borne this stench towards the Egyptian vessel, and thus, by a mere accident, one of the countless devices of these dealers in human flesh was found out.

It was necessary to employ force to get the slaves to emerge from their den, for they were under the impression that if they went on deck they would be massacred. In fact, they were running a great risk, the Mussulman Captain and his ten men having taken advantage of the attention of the Europeans being devoted to the rescue of the slaves, to construct a barricade aft.

They had rolled together three barrels of powder, and they declared positively that if they were to be ruined, if their slaves were taken away, they would blow up the boat and everybody on board.

CHAPTER II.

The threat, however, did not appear to affect either the Europeans or the Egyptian Commander; they went on leisurely with their work of deliverance, dragging one slave after another out of the black hole, and placing them on deck, where Dr. Delange attended to the worst cases. M. de Morin alone, after having exchanged a few words in a whisper with the Commander, went over the side, descended the rope ladder attached to it, got into the boat which had brought him, and, rowed by a couple of men, pulled towards the flotilla.

At length, the last slave was brought on deck; he was still breathing, and M. Delange managed, in a minute or two, to set him on his legs again, but of the hundred and twenty beings who had been set free, eight were suffocated, and defied every effort to restore animation to them. The remainder were as well as ever, despite their incarceration.

M. Périères asked himself whether it would not be better to order the slaves to rush all at once aft and massacre their former masters

before the latter had time to set fire to the powder barrels with the matches they were seen to hold in their hands. But one glance at the human crowd surrounding him sufficed to dispel the idea, for he saw that it consisted of men barely adults, a large proportion of women, and children of from eight to twelve years old. It would have been imprudent, in spite of their numbers, to rely upon such allies. Action, and that too of the most energetic sort possible, must be taken without any assistance from them. The reis and his men, in order to rouse themselves to courage and revenge, had just broached a cask of brandy, and, notwithstanding the precepts of the Koran, which they, in all probability, habitually set at nought, they were drinking bumpers of the ardent spirit. There was everything to be feared from their drunken excitement.

The Egyptian officer saw the danger, and, advancing alone along the deck, until within about a couple of yards from the barricade, he addressed the reis, who, though placid enough at the commencement when he thought he could escape any inspection, was now furious at seeing himself unmasked, ruined, and exposed to severe punishment.

"You will immediately order your men," said the Commander firmly, "to put out their portfires, and lay down their arms. In that way alone will you save your lives, for, if you

have not complied in five minutes' time, I will have the whole lot of you put to death."

"There will be no need for you to put us to death," shouted the reis. "If your men make a single movement against us, or if they load their guns, I will set light to the powder, and we will all be blown up together, you, I, our men, my slaves, and your Egyptians. You have given me five minutes to surrender," he continued, becoming more and more excited as he spoke. "I give you three to leave my boat, but without taking with you one of my slaves. As soon as you have regained your ship, if you attempt to chase us, there will still be time to blow myself up, and every man you seek to set free shall perish with me."

The Egyptian officer shrugged his shoulders, and, turning towards the Europeans, said—

"Did you understand what he said?"

"Tolerably well," replied M. Périères.

"What is to be done?" asked the officer. "You are my guests, and I am responsible for your safety. I have no right to expose you to any risk without your consent."

"Act," said Madame de Guéran, "as you would act if we were not with you. They are not Frenchmen who would counsel you to allow yourselves to be intimidated by such brigands as these, or to abandon all these slaves to their anger and revenge."

"Then, madam, I have but one course to

pursue—to make a rush with my men against that barricade and break through it before those wretches can get at the powder.

"Do so," simply replied Madame de Guéran.

"And we go with you," said MM. Périères and Delange to the Captain, as they took their places by his side.

"And I, too—have I not my revolver?" said a third voice.

It was brave Miss Poles, who, coquette as she was, resolved to enjoy male society at all hazards.

The Egyptian officer conversed in a low tone with his sailors, giving them orders, but appearing anxious and ill at ease on seeing their disinclination to obey him. These sailors, not nearly so well disciplined as the French, seemed desirous of arguing with their officer, and trying to make him understand that they would be all of them exposing themselves to certain death if they attacked the barricade in accordance with his orders. Indeed, their fears were reasonable, for the Mussulman reis and his men, more and more excited every moment, had just unheaded the powder barrels so that a spark alone was now needed to cause an explosion; and the staves and hoops of these barrels would be shattered to pieces, and would deal death on all around.

The position was as critical as could well be imagined—in spite of the danger of an attack,

and its too probably fatal result, the Egyptian officer, his natural pride being roused, and his *amour-propre* at stake in the presence of his stranger guests, wished to lead on his men.

They refused to obey him.

Exasperated by this mutiny, and beside himself with anger, he was going to fire on his own men, when suddenly, under a cloudless sky, studded with stars innumerable, and with a moon of marvellous brightness, an overwhelming shower, a veritable deluge, a sort of waterspout burst upon the deck of the vessel.

The occurrence appeared almost phenomenal; in reality it was very simple. M. de Morin, it will be remembered, had, about a quarter-of-an-hour previously, left the boat for the "Khédive," bearing an order for the steamer to close up. Whilst this manœuvre was being carried out, he was anxiously watching every movement of the Mussulman, and he began to tremble for his friends. His fears suggested to him a happy thought, almost an inspiration. He at once ordered the fire pump, which is to be found on board all men-of-war, to be manned, and told the sailors to play upon the after part of the slaver. This order was executed, and in a moment barricade, men, and powder were all inundated.

Thanks to M. de Morin, who, doubtless, remembered the way in which Marshal Lobau, in 1832, quelled a rising in Paris, the situation

was changed, and there was no longer anything to fear from the reis or his men.

The sailors of the "Khédive" rushed on them, and had them bound in a very short time.

But what was to be done with the slaves? That was a somewhat difficult question to answer. If they were left in possession of the boat they would be incapable of managing her, and would inevitably run her ashore, and, in all probability, perish. If, on the other hand, they were to be landed on the banks of the White Nile, they would run a great risk of again being made prisoners.

On questioning some of the poor creatures, it was discovered that the majority belonged to the tribes bordering on the Bahr-el-Ghazal, or Gazelle River. Taken captive by Moflo, the powerful chief of the Niam-Niam territory, who was annually accustomed to make razzias on a large scale amongst the neighbouring tribes, they had been sold some months previously to slave dealers.

As soon as she was made acquainted with these details, Madame de Gueran resolved to take charge of the liberated slaves, as they belonged to the districts through which she intended to pass. She ordered Nassar to take the new arrival in tow, and the little flotilla, following in the wake of the steamer, was thus augmented by another sail.

On their return to the "Khedive," the band of

Europeans lost no time in thanking M. de Morin for the service he had rendered them, whilst the Commander ordered the slave dealers to be put in irons and lodged in the hold, intending to bring them up before General Baker for trial.

It was not until an hour past midnight that the flotilla resumed its voyage up the White Nile, hugging the western bank, whence in the clear moonlight could be distinctly seen Arrache-Kol, an abrupt and rugged mountain, which seemed to spring up from the flat plains surrounding it. The river being both wide and deep, rapid progress was made, and the silence of the night was broken only by the noise of the "Khedive's" engines, and the continuous snoring, a rumbling sound, of the numerous hippopotami sleeping near the banks of the river. From time to time were mingled with these noises, the distant cries of some animal attacked by hyænas, and the occasional roaring of a lion, who thus saluted the flotilla as it passed on.

M. de Morin and Périères, their nerves still under the influence of the past excitement, and charmed by the beauty of the night, gave up all thoughts of sleep, and walked up and down the deck, listening intently to every sound that ushered in a world entirely new to them.

Suddenly, behind the "Khedive," and in the midst of the vessels she was towing, countless tongues of flame leapt up into the air.

The two watchers, in alarm and dismay, called on the officer of the watch, and he speedily discovered that the slave boat which had just been added to the flotilla was on fire.

The steamer was at once stopped, the boats were lowered, and the sailors on watch were speedily afloat.

CHAPTER III.

M. DE MORIN had a seat in the cutter which went to the relief of the burning ship, a simple act of justice, seeing that a fire was on the tapis and that he had just shown such skill in the management of the pump.

The flames spread with astonishing rapidity, running from end to end of the ship, and along the mast and ropes. They were not, however, of the reddish hue usually seen in such conflagrations, but might easily have been taken for Bengal-lights, or fireworks, their bluish rays tingeing the waters of the Nile and the neighbouring shore.

M. de Morin and the Egyptian sailors in vain attempted to solve this problem, but later on all was explained. It seems that the negroes, left to themselves on the boat, liberated by magic as it were, free from both duty and surveillance, had made up their minds to celebrate their triumph, to manifest their independence, and to testify their rejoicing. At first they were content with singing and shouting, and other discordant sounds, but very speedily they began to dance, and stamp about, and

betake themselves to all those extraordinary contortions common in their own countries on *fête* days. These gymnastic exercises gave them an appetite and also an idea that they had a perfect right to dispose of the provisions left on board the boat, and no longer reclaimable by their former masters. Then they turned their attention to the casks of brandy they had hankered after for so long a time, and, having discovered them, they at once, with that carelessness and love of waste so innate in their race, broke them open so that they might, as they thought, drink all the more quickly. The brandy ran in streams along the deck, and in its way met with a smouldering match. The result was, that in an instant the deck of the vessel became a huge bowl of punch, and the blue flames, which had so astonished M. de Morin, leaped up on all sides.

But, for all that, the negroes were none the less exposed to fearful danger. Many of them, in order to escape from the flames which seemed to pursue them, had already gone over the side and were clinging to the gunwale, others had swarmed up the mast, or were hanging to the yard, and these living clusters, suspended in mid air, and lighted up by the flames, produced a most singular effect. The women and children were rushing about in the liquid fire, uttering the most heart-rending shrieks.

The appearance of the flames soon changed from blue to red. The fire was not contented with running madly from one point to another, and licking the objects in its course without giving them a bite. It began to penetrate to the vital parts of the boat, and attacked the canvas, rope, planks and the thousand and one things scattered about the deck. Red tongues of flame darted skywards, lighting up all around, and being reflected back by the stream.

All the "Khedive's" boats had been lowered, and now surrounded the burning vessel, but without daring to approach too closely for fear of being crushed by the fall of the mast, or scorched by the sparks which were emitted in showers from the midst of the conflagration.

How were they to succour the poor creatures, deaf to all advice or command, and terrified to such an extent that they did not even think of throwing themselves into the Nile and taking refuge on board the other boats? The danger was increasing every moment, not to the slaves alone, but also to the whole flotilla, the flames being carried by the wind along the entire line. The order was just about to be given to cut the ropes which connected the burning boat with the others, when the idea occurred to M. Périères to make use of these ropes as a hanging bridge, to put the negroes in communication

with the remainder of the flotilla, assuming that if he could only induce one or two to make use of this route, the remainder would certainly follow their leaders like a flock of frightened sheep after the bell-wether.

An example was, however, necessary, and M. Périères did not hesitate for a moment. Having prevailed upon his boat's crew to row him as near as possible to the burning vessel, he seized a rope, crept along to the fore part of the ship, as yet untouched by the fire, endeavoured to attract the attention of some of the negroes, and, hanging by his hands on to one of the ropes, he made his way bit by bit to the flotilla.

As he had expected, he was speedily followed by a few, at first, of the slaves, then the numbers increased, and at last every one was anxious to follow the example set. The sturdy ones reached the goal, and the weak fell into the river, where they were picked up without delay by the boats of the steamer.

There still remained a score of women and children, who either had not strength enough to reach the rope, or were too much alarmed, or too intoxicated to do anything but watch their companions depart one after another, without a thought of following them, or an effort to cling to them. The flames would soon reach these poor creatures, and, more terrible danger still, the powder barrels, inundated some hours

previously, but now dry, might at any moment be attacked by the fire and deal death and destruction on all.

This time it was M. de Morin who devoted himself to the work of rescue. As his friend had done, he too got on board the burning vessel, seized upon each woman and child in turn, and, in spite of their shrieks and all their efforts to cling to him, he threw them overboard one after another, either to the sailors in the boats, who held out their arms to catch them, or into the river, whence they were dragged out before the current had time to carry them away.

This wholesale deliverance accomplished, M. de Morin was making ready to get away as fast as he could by diving into the river, when he thought he heard a cry from the after part of the ship. He turned and gazed anxiously towards the spot.

There, by the light of the conflagration, appeared a child of from seven to eight years of age, who had taken refuge in the wheel-house, and, from the midst of the flames surrounding him on every side, was tearfully holding out his little arms to M. de Morin.

He hesitated for a second, for they cried out from the boats—

"Do not venture—it is certain death! The fire is spreading towards the powder, and the ship will blow up, we must get away.

And, indeed, the boats were already being pulled away.

"Ah!" he exclaimed, "you leave me to my fate! Be it so! I will not abandon this poor little soul."

And then, creeping at one time along the vessel's side, at another catching hold of a rope, or a shroud, sometimes making his way along the deck itself, he went aft through the flames despite every obstacle, braving every danger.

At length he reached the wheel-house, mounted it, seized the child in his arms, and with him plunged into the river, without even calling on the boats to come to his assistance.

One of them saw him and got up to him just as the current was whirling him towards a snag, under which he would have been sucked by the stream, a bruised and bleeding mass.

Some moments afterwards, as the cutter was close by with the flotilla, a loud report was heard. The wretched slave-ship was engulfed in the Nile.

Madame de Gueran, standing on the poop of the "Khedive," had been a trembling, agitated spectator of all these scenes, and when MM. Périères and de Morin came on board, she rushed to them, grasped them by the hands, and utterly overcome, burst into tears.

CHAPTER IV.

The "Khedive," towing the flotilla, resumed her onward course; and, except the sailors on watch, everybody on board was sound asleep. Madame de Guéran had retired to her cabin, and her three companions, enveloped from head to foot in coverings to protect them from the mosquitoes, lay stretched at full length on the poop.

Miss Poles alone, indefatigable as ever, walked up and down the deck. She passed in review the occurrences of the night, called to mind the exploits of MM. de Morin and Périères, and debated within herself as to the one on whom she should bestow her still wavering heart.

Daybreak found her still in suspense, but her attention was then attracted to the sights surrounding her. A few yards from the steamer were numbers of hippopotami, who saluted the dawn by wallowing in the Nile; long lines of crocodiles basked in the first rays of the rising sun; herds of huge buffaloes, with outstretched necks and lowered heads, were drinking at the stream. In the distance, already lit up, forests

of mimosas and flowering soonts were seen surrounding a village of the Baggara tribe, those hardy horsemen and bold bandits who give only a grudging allegiance to the Egyptian Government. Soon the river itself became animated ; quite a fleet of light canoes, hollowed out of the trunks of the tamarind trees, crowded round the steamer, manned by fishermen of the Shillook tribe, who possess an immense extent of territory on the western bank of the Nile. In subjection to Egypt, this numerous, compact tribe, whose villages form an unbroken line along the river, musters more than twelve hundred thousand souls.

If civilization should ever penetrate into these territories, if the innumerable river-side tribes would unite together in one common interest, would obey one sole will, what tremendous power their ruler would possess, what weighty influence would be brought to bear upon the world by the African nation, now held in such contempt that even the most insignificant of European kingdoms would scorn to be named in the same breath with it! But the variety of religions, multiplied *ad infinitum*, or, to speak more correctly, the diverse beliefs and so-called religious superstitions will ever hold these tribes apart. The Mahomedans have a horror, either instinctive or instilled, of all these people, whom they stigmatise as pagans, and the latter, in their turn, loath the very name of Islamism, a

name which to them means their own subjection and enslavement. Thanks to our missionaries, Christianity, and it alone, may one day perhaps succeed in uniting these scattered souls, and may replace ignorance and superstition by knowledge and faith.

The passengers on board the "Khedive" saw nothing during the whole day but the vanguard of the Shillooks, for the Baggaras were denizens of the soil through which they were then passing. But on the morrow, villages succeeded the fishermen's canoes, and as the flotilla hove to for the purpose of laying in a stock of wood and durra, those on board were not sorry to have an opportunity of inspecting a village and making the acquaintance of its inhabitants.

A European who, without any transition stages, preparatory lessons, or preliminary studies, might suddenly find himself in Africa proper, in a Shillook village, would have some difficulty in persuading himself that he was awake, and might feel induced to ask whether he had not been transported, during sleep or by sudden death, to another planet. Imagine a collection of comical mud huts, looking like a large field of button mushrooms; round the majority of the huts a cordon of dried dung, set on fire at night by the natives, for the purpose of keeping the mosquitoes at a distance and frightening the hippopotami and the lions; in the centre of the village, a species of square

with one shady spot, furnished by a solitary tree on which are hung the drums, beaten, in case of alarm, to summon the inhabitants to arms. In this square, on mats and buffalo skins, spread out here and there, lie or squat the Shillooks, in utter laziness, sleeping or slowly inhaling the smoke from large pipes with bowls of clay. They are completely naked, but their bodies are encrusted with a thick coating, either of cowdung, or cinders, intended to protect them from the attacks of insects. Some are greyish in colour; these are the poor people, who cannot afford any other covering than the cinders of their own particular hearths. Others, the wealthy owners of a few cattle, make use of dung, and are a dirty red. Even their faces do not escape, every feature being hidden under the layers of filth which, as far as appearances go, seem natural to their skin.

But, nevertheless, they are not entirely without the desire to please, and, if they neglect their bodies, if coats of dirt take the place of coats of cloth, they take the greatest pains with their hair, devoting whole days to the adornment of it, and are quite capable, on this score, of giving any number of points to the most conceited of civilized beings. The hair, rendered stiff by the application of clay or grease, is dressed in the shape of a fan, or a top-knot, or a helmet above the head. The bird kingdom evidently furnishes them with models, and, in

this case, cocks and guinea fowls take the place of the wax heads in vogue amongst Parisian hairdressers.

The women, occupied in household affairs, obliged to nurse the babies, who may be seen grovelling in all the mud in the village, and entrusted with the care of the cattle, for which they have a prodigious respect, devote less time to their hair, contenting themselves with a little frizzing or a curl here and there. By way of making up for this, they pay a certain amount of respect to their bodies, and they fasten round their waists, before and behind, pieces of calf's skin, which hang down as far as their knees, forming thus a garment something like a pair of bathing drawers, but permitting a complete side view of their thighs and legs. This covering, incomplete though it be, is only used by the married women. The young girls remain quite naked until their marriage, and that, for certain reasons which will be explained, is frequently deferred until late in life. Amongst the Shillooks the man alone provides the dowry, consisting of a number of cattle, varying according to his means, which become the property of his father-in-law. If the wife is sent back by her husband or leaves him, her father has to repay the dowry, and it is consequently to his interest to prevent all squabbles, if possible, and, if not, to bring about a speedy reconciliation. The introduction

of this custom into France might possibly have its advantages. At all events our Parisian mothers-in-law, instead of fanning the flame, would exert themselves to put it out. In the meanwhile, until this suggested reform is carried out, we may congratulate the Shillook ladies on their primitive mode of dress. We shall very soon come to lands where man alone is clothed, and woman, whether girl, wife, or widow, young or old, ugly or pretty, never by any chance puts anything on.

None of the Shillooks, however rich in cattle, thought of offering even a cup of milk to the Europeans. Their laziness, stronger than their curiosity, chained them to the spot where they had first been seen. They opened their large eyes, scanned the strangers from head to foot, but remained unmoved Enveloped in their dirt, of one sort or another, their inert bodies might have been taken for abandoned corpses, or mummies of ancient Egypt.

As the Europeans were leaving the village, a few natives thought fit to follow them. They looked like dusky shadows, with their lazy mode of walking, their wonderfully skinny limbs, their flat chests and their small heads, made to appear smaller still by the immense *coiffure* on top of them. Some were armed with long serrated lances, others with club-headed, sharp-pointed sticks. Eminently practical, the Shillooks make their weapons serve also as fishing

tackle; they disdain the bow and arrow, and replace them by a kind of harpoon, intended for the benefit of the crocodiles and hippopotami.

They appeared, moreover, disposed to give their visitors an opportunity of witnessing their mode of fishing, and some of them brought with them their light canoes, which they never leave on the banks of the Nile, carrying them, after each expedition, on their shoulders back to the village.

Night was falling as the handful of Europeans, followed by a few natives, wended their way towards the river and their flotilla. The hour was propitious for a hippopotamus hunt. This animal, after disporting himself in the river during the day, betakes himself in the evening to some plain or pasture land, where he grazes like other ruminants, his amphibious qualities enabling him to vary his pleasures. The hunters let him go inland, and as soon as they know his retreat they approach him with lighted torches, shouting and beating their drums. The hippopotamus, in alarm and anxious to regain the river, goes back there by the way he came. Then another set of hunters, posted on either side of his path, let fly at him with their formidable harpoons, to each of which is attached, by means of a line about twenty feet long, a float or buoy. The wounded animal carries away with him the shaft which has pierced him, rushes to the Nile and plunges

down to a considerable depth under water, the better to hide himself. But the buoys float on the surface, showing his course, and when, weakened by loss of blood, he rises to the surface of the stream, he is attacked anew, despatched and dragged to the shore to be cut up.

The Europeans assisted at an attack made after this fashion upon a magnificent male hippopotamus, and, from the boats which had brought them from the "Khedive," they had a capital view of every incident of the hunting or fishing, by whichever name it may be called. For more than an hour the animal struggled against death, dyeing the water of the Nile with his blood, and from time to time, coming up to the surface, he raised his enormous head, noisily inhaled the fresh air, and fixed his eyes on the tiny canoes surrounding, and gradually closing in upon him.

M. de Morin, desirous of putting an end to the creature's sufferings, fired and hit him in the head. The hippopotamus gave vent to a fearful roar, leaped almost out of the water, and then plunged beneath the stream, once more leaving behind him a rather dangerous eddy. The natives protested, when they saw M. de Morin take up his gun, fearing, no doubt, that if he killed the beast he would lay claim to it. But when they saw that the shot had not taken effect, they passed, without any intermediate stage, from extreme anger to uncontrollable and

very obstreperous mirth. Shrieks of laughter resounded from all the canoes, and every finger was pointed in ridicule at the clumsy white man, who, though carrying thunder and lightning with him, in the shape of a gun, yet missed his aim.

M. de Morin was bent on having his revenge, and opportunely thought of a certain piece of advice given by the hunters. Consequently, when about ten minutes afterwards, the head of the animal re-appeared, he aimed behind the ear, the vulnerable part, and the shot took effect.

A final roar, a dying groan was heard, a fresh stream of blood mingled with the waters of the Nile, and the animal, not having strength enough to get under water again, was towed ashore by the line attached to the harpoon, and marked, as we have already said, by a float.

To the great delight of the natives, M. de Morin, who was deemed to be a personage of some importance in their eyes, apparently scorned his share of the quarry, for he ordered the rowers to pull him to the "Khedive." But the escort of the expedition, who were all together on board the boat set apart for their use, had also followed with eager eyes all the incidents of the chase, actuated, undoubtedly, by the very natural feeling that hippopotamus flesh would be a variety in their daily ration, that when well dried by the sun and properly

cooked it would afford them an excellent meal, and that, from every point of view, it would be absurd to leave so savoury a prey to such wretches, such contemptible heathens as the Shillooks. No sooner did the thought strike them than a dozen soldiers jumped into the boat belonging to their diahbeeah, landed, ran in amongst the natives, and, seizing the rope by which they were hauling the hippopotamus ashore, proceeded, in their turn, to tow the beast in the direction of the flotilla.

The Shillooks at once gave vent to fearful yells; some rushed off to the village for reinforcements, others beat the drum for assistance, and, from all points of the compass, shoals of natives, club in hand and canoe on back, appeared in sight, as if by enchantment.

The Nubians had, by this time, regained their boat. They had taken the hippopotamus in tow, and were on the point of reaching their diahbeeah, when more than a hundred canoes, placed in the water with inconceivable rapidity, in a solid, compact mass, forming, as it were, a single raft, and manned by a crowd of infuriated natives, brandishing their arms and shrieking for vengeance, advanced against the Franco-Egyptian flotilla.

The expenditure of a few rounds of ammunition would have done for the Shillooks, notwithstanding their numbers. Nothing would have been easier, either, than to run the

"Khedive" full steam ahead right into the middle of the canoes. But though such an act of barbarity might find favour in some eyes, it was repulsive, not only to the Europeans, but also to the Egyptian Commander, seeing that the natives had not attacked until after provocation on the part of the Nubian soldiers.

M. de Morin, who had been watching the turn of events from his boat, now thought it high time to interfere. Telling his rowers to pull alongside the boat occupied by the escort, he took hold of a hatchet and, without further ado, cut the rope by which the hippopotamus was being towed. The Shillooks stopped at once, and, forgetting all about their intended revenge, only thought of regaining the spoil they had so nearly lost.

Restitution having been thus made, M. de Morin bethought himself of another necessary duty. He accordingly made for the vessel to which the Nubians had just returned, grumbling and rather ashamed of their failure. He called Nassar, reprimanded him sharply for having allowed his men to attempt such an act of robbery, and ordered the immediate administration, in his presence, of ten lashes with the cat-o'-nine-tails to the back of each of the five men who had been the first to quit their vessel. At this time, on the eve of the departure of the Egyptian man-of-war, when the expedition was about to be left to its own resources, it was of

the greatest importance, for the safety of all, to impose strict discipline on the escort, and to make it perfectly clear that the power of punishment was vested in the Europeans.

M. de Morin's firmness produced an excellent effect on all these men, who are just as ready to bite the hand that pats them as they are to lick the one that strikes them, provided always that the striker is possessed of assured force and incontestable authority. The white man rose a hundred degrees in the estimation of the negroes, and became at once, in their eyes, the veritable chief of the caravan.

The flotilla now resumed its voyage up stream. Throughout the day the town of Fashoda, the extreme limit of Egyptian rule, had been in sight, and our travellers were now entering a new region, Negro-land proper.

On the following day the expedition passed the mouth of the river Sobat, latitude 9°21′14″ north, and a few miles farther on reached the Bahr Giraffe, a small river entering the Nile, between the Sobat and the Bahr-el-Gazal. Some hours later they came to the last-named river, and up it the Europeans, adhering strictly to their programme, had to make their way, leaving the Egyptian steamer to continue on her course up the White Nile as far as Gondokoro.

After having taken a cordial leave of the Commander of the "Khedive," of whom they could not speak too highly, Madame de Guéran

and her companions went on board the vessel set apart for their use. The tow-ropes were cast off, the diahbeeahs hoisted their huge sails, and the European expedition, unsupported and unprotected, obliged to rely upon its own resources, veered off, under a parting salute from the guns of the "Khedive."

CHAPTER V.

Serious difficulties and obstacles without number were destined to present themselves on the very first day, as if to warn the travellers that two courses alone were open to them—either to retrace their steps whilst there was yet time, or to nerve themselves to the accomplishment of their perilous undertaking.

The Gazelle River, or Bahr-el-Gazal, up which they were sailing, bears no resemblance to the Nile. The latter, above Khartoum, is a majestic stream, increasing in volume as its sources are approached. Its banks are occasionally encumbered with floating plants, but a powerful current runs through their midst, and leaves a superb passage way, often quite free and clear, to the vessels which navigate it. The Gazelle River, on the contrary, resembles a huge marsh, whose waters appear to lie stagnant and overgrown by vegetation. A passage has to be made, at the cost of extreme and tedious exertion, through a narrow channel, amidst a mass of nenuphars, dense papyrus rushes, and small plants, called "selt," which

choke every opening, close up every crevice, and, so to speak, bind one obstacle to another.

Mdlle. Tinne, in 1863, Schweinfurth, in 1869, and Baker, in 1870, had already been stopped by this vegetable barrier, and the expedition of 1873 met with similar difficulties. At length the flotilla was utterly unable to move ahead, in spite of a favourable wind and the power of the huge sails.

Then the escort, the fifty bearers, and the adult negroes, who had been rescued by the Egyptian steamer, had to leave the boats, plunge waist-high in the marsh, lay hold of long ropes, and drag each vessel along by sheer force, one after the other. MM. de Morin, Périères, and Delange were anxious to lend a hand, but, like Louis XIV., whose grandeur kept him on shore, they were confined to their vessel by the fear of losing caste in the eyes of the negroes, who, looking down upon manual labour, hold in slight esteem any white man who is imprudent enough to put himself on a par with them and share their work.

The trio were, nevertheless, obliged to join them, not to help, but to rescue them. These marshes, or floating islets, and all this luxuriant vegetation, serve as haunts, or cover, for herds of hippopotami and countless crocodiles. As a rule, the shouting and singing of the blacks, and the encouraging voices of those on board the boats, drive away all these creatures,

which could be seen hurrying off towards the dense thickets, where their instinct told them they would be safe. But it occasionally happened that one of them, sound asleep on his bed of roses, would suddenly emerge from the middle of a brake, and show signs of attacking the strangers who were venturesome enough to intrude on his domain. Then one of the three Parisians, or, sometimes, all three together, roused by the shouts of the terrified blacks, would leave their vessel, and advance against the common enemy. The struggle was never very prolonged, for the crocodiles, though their ferocity is very great, invariably take to flight when attacked in earnest.

Though these incidents of the voyage, the sudden disembarkation and hurried chase, made the time pass quickly enough for most of the travellers, the trusty Joseph did not appear to appreciate them. His master, in order to give him something to do and prevent his growing so fat as to present later on a toothsome morsel for some cannibal, had decided that he should take part in all the excursions, to carry the spare rifles and ammunition.

Having thus taken the field, Joseph found himself compelled to wade through the marshes, struggle against the too importunate rushes, and advance against the crocodiles, and with a very bad grace he submitted, much to the amusement of Miss Beatrice Poles. The unfor-

tunate man, nevertheless, really deserved commiseration. His white skin and soft flesh excited the curiosity and the appetite, not only of the crocodiles (which would not have been very dangerous, seeing that M. de Morin was at hand to defend his servant), but of the leeches, green flies, and tiger mosquitoes which abound in the districts watered by the Bahr-el-Gazal. The leeches were the principal offenders, audaciously making their way inside his leggings and inflicting many a bleeding wound. The poor fellow began to find out that he was paying rather a high price in advance for his lovely slave girls and elephants' tusks.

Whilst Joseph groaned and removed from his calves some obstinate leech which, never having tasted so succulent a dish, persisted in its endeavours to continue its repast, Madame de Guéran, Miss Poles, and their three companions, their work over for the day, reclined on board their boat, dragged onward by three hundred arms, and gazed at the surrounding scenery.

It is impossible to give any adequate idea of these strange regions, and it is difficult to realize that you are sailing in a river or on board ship. You are induced to think that you are on *terra firma*, in a vast plain watered by rivulets, and interspersed with pools and insignificant lakes. The sun finds a mirror in all these waters and lends additional splendour to massive stems, to flowers of every hue, to plants of every kind,

revelling in a perpetual bath, to nenuphars red, white and blue, and to magnificent thickets of the papyrus, which raise their crowns twenty feet above the surrounding flood.

Round these stems, large as sugar canes, were fastened at nightfall the ropes which secured the flotilla. The darkness prevented any further attempt to carve out a passage along the narrow channel, and it would have been simply inhuman to leave the crowd of haulers in the midst of a dense vegetation when at each step they ran the risk of being lost to view.

CHAPTER VI.

At sunrise MM. Périères and de Morin gave the order to move on, but the escort, bearers, and slaves all remained motionless. They were seated on deck, huddled together, inert, and deaf to all commands.

M. Périères summoned one of the Nubians, who had been appointed to the post of overseer, and told him to take one of the drums which hung on the mast and give such a roll on it that the meaning of the signal could not be mistaken.

The man obeyed, but the noise did not produce any visible effect on those on board the neighbouring boats. They, one and all, remained perfectly silent and passive.

Then the two young men, in astonishment and something akin to alarm, despatched the Nubian in search of Nassar, who turned up in a few moments in a state of exasperation.

"What is the matter?" asked M. de Morin, curtly.

"The matter is," replied the guide, "that our men refuse to tow the boats as they did yesterday."

"Why?"

"The escort say that they were engaged to protect you and to defend you in case of attack, but not to do any hauling work."

"And their companions—what do they say?"

"Much the same; they were engaged as bearers, and nobody has a right to make them do anything in connection with the boats."

"They have no other motives for their refusal to work than these?"

"They pretend also that they were hurt yesterday by the 'om-souf,' and they do not care about exposing themselves to it any more."

This is the Arabic name given to a plant covered with spines which lacerate the flesh and draw blood.

"Anything else?" asked M. de Morin.

"Yes; they state that to-day they will be in greater danger still if they push on through the marshes, because the hippopotami and crocodiles have neared us during the night, and surround us on all sides."

"And what have you done to overcome the insubordination of your men?"

"I have threatened them and beaten them; but they refuse to obey."

"It is a planned thing, then?"

"Yes; I fear it is a regular plot."

"Very well," exclaimed M. de Morin. "We

shall never reach our journey's end if I do not bring these people to reason at once."

And, so saying, he went in the direction of a temporary bridge connecting his own boat with that of the escort.

M. Périères stopped him.

"My dear fellow," said he, "I beg of you not to do anything until you have heard what I have to say. Our guide appears to possess great influence over these men, who, as a rule, both fear and obey him. If, in spite of the reproofs which he has administered, the blows which he has struck, they persist in their disobedience, it shows that the plot is a serious business. We must put an end to it, of course; in that I am entirely with you. But do not let us waste our strength, I beg of you. What were you going to do? Give an order to crack the ringleader's skull, in case of resistance? We shall, no doubt, be reduced to that extremity some day, but, possibly, just now, we might find some other method of intimidation."

"Do you know of any?" asked M. de Morin.

"I think I do. Will you let me try it?"

"With all the pleasure in life. I do not care about killing anybody; I only insist, in the common interest, upon being obeyed."

"And so you shall—I answer for it."

M. Périères called Nassar, who had discreetly withdrawn, and asked him at what hour the men usually breakfasted.

"At seven o'clock," answered the guide.

"Where are their rations for this morning?"

"On the overseer's boat. They are now getting ready the durra and the meat you promised them yesterday as a reward for their exertions."

"Very well. Tell the cooks to suspend operations. Neither the escort nor the bearers shall eat to-day until they have worked. It is of no use telling them so beforehand; go back to them and let them rest at their ease."

About an hour after this conversation a certain amount of animation was visible amongst the Nubians, who began to yawn and stretch themselves, some even exerting themselves to the extent of standing upright. Their appetites returned, and very soon, as the wild beasts in a menagerie become restless on the approach of feeding time, so all the negroes took to walking about and turning their longing eyes towards the overseer's boat, where their daily breakfast was usually prepared.

But the hour passed, the mists of the morning were dissipated by the burning rays of the sun, and still no breakfast made its appearance.

Then, both soldiers and bearers began to grumble, and growl, and gesticulate, and the boldest, or the hungriest man amongst them went up to Nassar, who was seated in a corner,

tranquilly smoking his pipe, and opened the proceedings.

"We are hungry," said he.

"Well, eat," replied the guide, puffing away at his pipe.

"We cannot, because no one has brought us our breakfast."

"That is because there is no one to bring it to you. See if you can find somebody."

The black went and told his comrades what the guide had said.

"He is right," exclaimed a chorus of voices.

A dozen Nubians were selected by their comrades and despatched as envoys extraordinary. They speedily gained the overseer's boat, and went with timid, hesitating steps towards the cook-house and provision store, but stopped in dismay on seeing that both these places were hermetically closed.

After noting their disappointment, M. Périères joined them in a casual sort of way, and asked them what they meant by coming on board without being sent for.

"We came," murmured one of them "in search of our breakfast."

"What breakfast?" asked the Frenchman, with an air of astonishment. "You are no longer in my service, and, consequently, I am not bound to feed you."

Light now began to dawn on their understandings.

"My friends and I," resumed M. Périères —the interpreter, Ali, translating his words— "agreed to share our provisions with you, because we hoped by to-morrow to reach the Nuehr territory, and soon afterwards the Meshera of Rek. But you refuse to tow the boats, and as we are in consequence threatened with a prolonged sojourn here, we shall keep our provisions to ourselves. If you make up your minds to work you shall have your dinner, but you will get no breakfast to-day. Go and tell your comrades what I have said, and do not come near me again unless I send for you."

The Nubians left the boat with a very downcast air, and went to give an account of their interview. A good deal of murmuring and shouting ensued, but at length all the blacks, soldiers and bearers, persuaded by the commonsense portion of the community, and, above all, acted on by their empty stomachs, plunged into the marsh, seized the tow ropes, and began to haul away with a will.

Two hours afterwards, M. Périères ordered them on board again, and there they found awaiting them a substantial repast, with the additional luxury of a plentiful supply of coffee. Touched by this delicate attention, and moved still more by the firmness displayed by the Europeans, the haulers lost no time in resuming their arduous toil and, towards evening, in spite

of the slow rate of progress, the flotilla reached the Nuehr district.

This numerous tribe, whose territory extends southward of the Shillook district, resembles its neighbours in manners and customs. But, if proximity induces resemblance, it also engenders unconquerable enmity; for, in Africa, the fact of two tribes being contiguous to each other suffices to breed hatred and warfare between them. And so it happens that the Nuehrs are of necessity a most warlike race, ever ready to defend their frontier on the north against the Shillooks, and on the south against the Dinkas.

As soon as the inhabitants perceived the European fleet they rushed to their light canoes and brought off goats and sheep in exchange for ornaments. For a few coloured glass beads, worth about a couple of francs, M. Delange, who was at the head of the commissariat department, procured a splendid sheep. Joseph's delight on seeing the conclusion of the bargain knew no bounds—he had not been deceived, and soon, very soon, he would set eyes on that country where, for next to nothing, he could lay in a stock of slaves and ivory.

Notwithstanding all the obstacles to its progress, the flotilla was not long in reaching the point where the Bahr-el-Arab, a somewhat important affluent of the Bahr-el-Gazal, joins that river, if, indeed, such a name can be given to a vast marsh, without current, and choked with

vegetation. Thanks to that junction, the progress of the boats was accelerated considerably; the rushes became less dense, and the passage way was enlarged. There was no longer any necessity to tow the boats; the oars and poles were sufficient to propel them, and very soon the sails were brought into requisition.

On the following evening the flotilla arrived at the end of its voyage, Port Rek, a post established in a district belonging to the Dinka tribe, on an islet surrounded by insalubrious swamps. The journey by water was over, and the Europeans had now to turn their attention to the definite formation of a caravan for the purpose of proceeding by land on their way southwards.

But a whole week elapsed before the Rek traders were able to procure the large number of bearers required by the expedition, and, in addition to this, considerable time was consumed in landing all the baggage, provisions of all kinds, and the articles for barter and exchange which were on board the boats. All these affairs led to delay, and to while away their leisure hours and escape from the pestitential marshes, where so many Europeans have succumbed, our travellers resolved upon an elephant hunt or two in the neighbourhood.

CHAPTER VII.

The English Captain, Burton, in one of his works, advances the theory that the elephant possesses an instinct quite equal to the natural intelligence, not only of the Africans, but also of numbers of Europeans. We are, therefore, at liberty to devote a page or two to an animal created by nature to humiliate us. And, to begin with, it cannot fail to be a matter of astonishment that the elephant is not in Africa, as in Asia, trained to the service of man. One reason given for this contrast is, that the African elephant has so much more savage a nature than his Asiatic brother, that it is impossible to tame or train him. This view cannot be seriously entertained for a moment, seeing that there are plenty of stone carvings and medals to show that in ancient Egypt, in the time of the Pharaohs, and later still, under the Roman rule, the elephant was reduced to the condition of a beast of burden. The real secret of his being useless is to be found in the sluggish, careless, inert character of the Arab, Turk, and negro. They would never have patience to await the complete development of

an animal which comes to maturity slowly and without hurrying itself in the least, by reason of the length of life allotted to it, for it is admitted that in certain regions the elephant attains to the patriarchal age of three hundred years. The commercial spirit and rapacity of the African tribes have also contributed to convert the elephant into an article of merchandize, and his strength and often surprising activity are unheeded. The animal disappears and his ivory alone remains. To procure and supply the ever insatiable merchants with the number of tusks they require, and to get in exchange the coveted bracelets and necklets in copper or iron, the natives organize extensive battues, wholesale slaughterings, which will soon make the elephant as scarce as was the mastodon in antediluvian times.

When we reflect that ivory is a luxury, an ornament merely, prescribed by fashion alone, and even then to a very limited extent, we cannot help deploring the rapid extinction of one of the noblest of the animal species bestowed on us by nature, and a feeling of regret must arise when we think of the fatigue, hardships, and sufferings undergone by thousands of human beings in order to satisfy one of the many fanciful tastes of Europe. When we see, in the boudoir of some fair dame, the ivory-bound prayer book, our imagination transports us at once to the heart of Africa, and there we behold

long caravans of slaves bending under the weight of the elephants' tusks with which their oppressors have overloaded them. We see a hundred tribes ever fighting to enrich themselves at the expense of their neighbours by means of ivory. We repeat, the greater part of the internecine wars which are depopulating this part of the world are caused by the slave and ivory merchants—these two death-dealing trades are inseparable from and spring out of each other.

But, instead of bestowing any further pity on the African, let us turn our attention to his cruel battues and the ferocity he shows in his expeditions against the elephant.

Hunters like Baldwin, the brothers Poncet, Baker, or Cumming, boldly attack the animal and try to shoot him behind the ear, or in the shoulder, when, as a rule, he falls in a heap, without pain or suffering. If they miss, their danger is extreme ; the colossus makes at them, and in open ground the best runners are unable to get away from him. This fair fight between a man and an enemy of strength and intelligence is above criticism.

A few natives also risk their lives, and sometimes lose them in the pursuit ; but in battues on a large scale, they enclose the quarry gradually in a confined area, which they surround by night with a fencing made by binding the creepers together. Then they summon the

inhabitants of the neighbouring villages, draw near to the palisading, and endeavour to despatch the enemy with their arrows. But if the barrier placed in his path is enough to retard his flight, it is utterly futile against his anger and thirst for revenge. Frequently he overturns all obstacles, hurls himself against his assailants, and commits fearful havoc amongst the crowd.

In other districts the hunters on horseback try to tire the elephant out by driving him before them. As soon as they see that he is exhausted, one of them makes his appearance right in front of him, to induce him to start off in pursuit and fix his attention on one single point. Another dismounts, runs towards the animal, and stabs him from behind with a lance, made from three to four yards long so as to reach his vitals. If the elephant is not killed at once the hunter is at the mercy of his infuriated foe.

But the negroes of Central Africa are, as a rule, too cowardly to run any such risks, and too lazy to hunt a single animal. Their idea is a wholesale massacre, a vast hecatomb, where courage does not count, victory is certain, and the profit considerable.

At the first warning of the presence of a herd of elephants, the men collect by thousands to the beat of the drum, just as if they were called upon to defend their country from invasion.

They drive their enemies before them, and the animals eventually take refuge either amongst the high grass in the plain, or in the forest. Then the natives set fire to the vegetation, and the elephants soon find themselves surrounded by a circle of fire and smoke, which gradually contracts and bars all escape. Suffocated and half-roasted, they die in horrible agony.

MM. de Morin, Périères, and Delange relied, as far as their elephant hunt was concerned, on their skill, coolness, and courage alone, albeit they had not thought themselves called upon to follow the advice given by Livingstone, who says—"The war-cry of an enraged elephant sounds in the ear of his foe just like the whistle of a French locomotive would on that of a man who found himself on the line without any means of escape. I advise all Nimrods who wish to experience this hazardous hunting to nerve themselves to it by standing on a line of rails and there remaining until an approaching train is only a very short distance from them."

We have already said that Madame de Guéran and Miss Poles, if they did not intend to hunt, were still bent on accompanying the hunters; and the two interpreters, with a dozen Dinkas and a like number of Nubians selected from the escort, made up the party. Nassar was obliged to remain at Port Rek to attend to the preparations for departure, and to keep watch over the forty soldiers and the bearers, old and new, left

under his care. It would have been imprudent to have left these people to themselves during the absence of their masters, for they would assuredly have picked a quarrel with the natives, and so have compromised the Europeans.

M. de Morin, assured that his valet would not be of any use during the excursion, had given him leave of absence, but in the breast of Joseph a love of ivory triumphed over all idleness and timidity. He begged that he might be allowed to go, and his master, taking for devotion what in reality was greed, permitted him to join the hunters. These latter, all on horseback, not excepting even Miss Poles, who was, with considerable difficulty, made to understand that she would delay matters if she went on foot, started about 5 a.m. After having left the marshes and the banks of the stream, the party made their way in the direction of a plain on the outskirts of a forest, where, it was reported, a large number of elephants had taken up their abode. The natives, informed on the previous evening of the arrival of the Europeans, hurried to meet them, accompanied by their sorcerer, each tribe possessing an elephant charmer, who has to be consulted before any hunt is undertaken. If he says that it cannot take place without risk, lances, and bows and arrows are laid aside, and every man betakes himself to his own house. If, on the contrary, the sorcerer says that the

fates are propitious, arms are brandished valiantly, and the march against the enemy begins. As soon as the animal is sighted, the charmer addresses him as follows:—"Oh, chief! we are come to kill you. Oh, chief! like so many others, you are about to die. The gods have so declared to me this night, and before the end of the day we shall eat you."

Notwithstanding this magniloquent discourse, the natives, as a rule, take to flight at the first approach of the huge beast, if he rushes out into the open and no safe cover is at hand. And this is exactly what happened at the beginning of the hunt we are about to describe. Whilst the Europeans were preparing to enter the forest, a loud noise was heard in the neighbouring thickets, out of which a female elephant, followed by her young one, emerged almost immediately. The natives, including the sorcerer, took to their heels at once in all directions, and left their guests to take care of themselves.

CHAPTER VIII.

The elephant did not appear to be aware of the presence of the hunters. She was playing with her mammoth baby, about three years old, flourishing her trunk in evident enjoyment, fanning herself with her huge ears, and whisking her tail to and fro to show how thoroughly comfortable she was. When she was tired of these amusements she drew near a tree, called by the Arabs hegelig, and appeared to relish highly its fruit, known under the name of *lalôb*. Her appetite was, no doubt, rather tickled than satisfied, and very soon she was seen to wend her way towards a swamp, where, after having gambolled for a short time, she set to work on the seeds of the papyrus, *souteb* in Arabic, which the African elephants on the banks of the Nile prefer even to the *lalôb*.

M. de Morin, as the most experienced sportsman of the community, assumed the direction of the hunt, and, first of all, warned the escort not to fire until he gave the word. But a Dinka, more hot-headed than his comrades, disobeyed him and let fly with his carbine.

The mother at once suspended her repast,

raised her head, and tried to discover her enemy. In that she could not succeed, for an elephant's sight is defective, though the keenness of their scent more than makes up for that deficiency. The animal smelt the powder, and without any hesitation or apparent fear of failure she rushed off towards the spot whence the shot had been fired, followed by her baby.

The noise made by an elephant in its angry rush is indescribable; the earth shakes and trembles beneath the tread of its huge feet. One might almost imagine that the ground was about to open and display to view some subterranean volcano, or that thunder was rumbling in the distance. Every obstacle in the way of this impetuous rush is broken, crushed, torn up by the roots; the sturdiest plants are destroyed, the thickets disappear, inequalities become smooth, enormous trees are sometimes uprooted, and the grain fields of a whole district ravaged.

The two elephants, large and small, passed close to the Europeans without paying any attention to them, or even appearing to see them. They doggedly followed the course they had marked out for themselves, straight against the invisible foe, whose incautious shot had announced his presence and betrayed his hiding-place.

All the negroes of the escort set off at full gallop, but the Dinka hunter, who had most

need to flee, had dismounted, and his horse, alarmed by the shot, had broken loose and was careering over the plain. The unfortunate black, thrown upon his own resources, made off with surprising celerity, but, in spite of all his efforts, he was speedily overtaken. The elephant seized him with her trunk, raised him in the air, and hurled him to the ground with the evident intention of trampling him to death. It very seldom happens, indeed, that the animal we are discussing tramples down his enemy at the first onset. He prefers to make use of his trunk, as we do of our arms, and knocks down his antagonist before he proceeds to make an end of him.

A Nubian, or any other negro would have fallen down, half fainting and almost dead with fright, at the very feet of the huge assailant. But the Dinkas, whose courage we have already mentioned, understand the art of keeping cool under adverse circumstances. The man who, after having been so roughly lifted up from earth, had fallen on the ground once more, got up quickly and ran for refuge under the belly of the baby elephant. The mother, rather taken aback by this novel mode of procedure, hesitated for a moment, and then very leisurely seized her prisoner once more, keeping her eyes fixed all the while very affectionately on her offspring.

The Dinka executed his little manœuvre a

second time, and again he was removed, but very quietly.

But now the elephant, whose anger appeared to have subsided, became furious again, and, after lifting the Dinka up again with her trunk, she swung him to and fro violently in order to stun him and render him incapable of further flight.

Another moment, and the poor wretch would have been lost.

Suddenly, a shot was fired, and the baby elephant fell.

It was M. Périères who did the deed. Finding it impossible to fire at the female, without running the risk of killing the man whom she held straight in front of her, and thinking, justly, that if he merely wounded her she would only become still more furious and would at once despatch her victim, he, in sheer despair, fired at the baby to draw off the attention of its mother.

The stratagem succeeded. In terror and despair the unhappy brute, instead of crushing the negro beneath her feet, left him to run to the assistance of her wounded offspring. She bent down to it, went on her knees, and with her trunk searched along its back and neck for the wound. Having found it she expelled water from her stomach and bathed the place. Then, as if she wanted to stop the flow of blood and close the aperture made by the bullet, she clung

to her little one, holding it close to her, trying to heal its flesh with her own. At the same time she uttered low plaintive moans, almost human in sound, and from her eyes, so expressive, though so small, one might have supposed tears to be falling.

But the little elephant struggled in vain against death. Its body writhed convulsively, it rolled on to its side, its limbs became stiff, and life was extinct.

The mother, after a last moan, a more heart-rendering cry than all, got up suddenly and looked about for vengeance.

The Dinka was still running, but he had already put a considerable distance between himself and the elephant, and had nearly gained the forest where he sought a refuge.

Pursuit was useless, and the animal understood that. Perhaps, too, its marvellous intelligence led it to suppose that the fugitive was not the only enemy, and that other hunters were lying hidden in the clearing behind the thickets. These must be found and killed.

Lashing with its trunk in all directions, and trumpeting loudly, its gaze wandered over the high grass, and at length it made its way directly towards the spot where Madame de Guéran, Miss Poles, and their companions still remained.

The danger was becoming imminent and terrible, for the animal was not thirty paces,

distant, when three shots resounded in the air and the elephant, hit in the shoulder, rolled over.

The hunters then left the brake and advanced cautiously, as they had been warned to do. Elephants, thought to be dead, have been known to struggle to their feet, and, with a supreme effort, charge into the midst of their adversaries, to expire, a moment afterwards, on top of their mangled and bleeding corpses. But this one was so thoroughly deprived of life that even Joseph was not afraid to approach it, after having, first of all, shut his eyes and let fly with his rifle into space. He did not neglect any precaution, and was determined to show how brave he could be in face of an enemy incapable of defending itself.

The natives, on whose ground the hunt took place, had withdrawn to a convenient distance on the first appearance of the elephant, but they were not altogether disinterested spectators. Hidden away in all directions, they followed with their eyes every incident from afar, and as soon as they saw the huge beast fall, they rushed upon her from all points of the compass with a celerity quite equal to that shown by them when running away. In speed they rivalled the kites and vultures which had scented the prey from on high, and now flew down from the sky, where a moment before they had been invisible, to share in the feast.

"I have often," says Schweinfurth, "had occasion to notice a similar occurrence in a clear sky. Almost as soon as the quarry has fallen, you may see black specks in the sky increasing gradually in size, and followed by other specks which become enlarged in an equal ratio. They come nearer, and their shape can be made out; they are kites, and vultures, and other birds of prey coming to claim their share of the spoil. One might almost suppose, with the ancients, that the sky is divided into several stages, where the birds of prey, ever on the watch, swoop down from the various regions they occupy, as soon as they see a tempting morsel below."

Crowding round the elephant and disputing its possession with the birds of prey, the natives measured the beast they were about to cut up. It had reached its full development, and was nearly nine feet high, or almost as tall as the males of the Asiatic species.

Joseph's despair was most ludicrous when he learnt that his masters were not only going to hand over the body, but also the precious tusks to the natives. What! did they make so light of those precious tusks which had appeared to him in all his dreams, and for which he had given up his beloved Rue Taitbout, his friendships with the waiters at Tortoni's, his intimacy with the hunter of the Helder, his professor of Arabic, and his much-appreciated negress? This splendid ivory, out of which a Parisian shop-

keeper would have made such a handsome profit, which might have been converted so easily into so many choice articles for the toilet, had been handed over, under his very eyes, to these wretched niggers, half naked and naturally ignorant of the use of a clothes-brush and rice-powder. Fortunately, however, the hunt was not quite over, and there was still hope.

The death of the young elephant, the distress of its mother, and the sufferings of these intelligent beasts, had made a lively impression on the hunters and had in some degree moderated their bellicose ardour. But wonderful tales were told them of the forest lying before them; they had never penetrated into these vast jungles, where Nature appears to have launched out into magnificent extravagance; they were attracted by these gloomy haunts, these mysterious depths, and were anxious to pay them a visit.

CHAPTER IX.

It was about two o'clock in the afternoon when the explorers entered the forest, followed by their escort of Nubians and Dinkas, who had by that time turned up again. Several natives, foregoing all claim to any share in the defunct elephants, volunteered to act as guides to the white folk, hoping that the strangers would persevere both in their successful hunting and their generosity in waiving their right to the spoil. The forest extended for some ten leagues in a south-easterly direction, and the marshy nature of the ground, though at this particular time it was dry enough, had imparted considerable luxuriance to the vegetation. The acacia, mimosa, tallan, tamarind and sycamore trees attained a noticeable altitude, and the sterculia, whose trunk tapers off gradually towards its top, reached a height of a hundred feet. The intervals between these trees, for the most part very large, were choked by papyrus tufts growing out of small pools of water, remnants of the former marsh, by sturdy climbing plants, by impenetrable patches of high grasses, and by the calamus with its formidable spines.

The heat beneath this dense foliage was excessive, resembling that of a hot-house, but the Europeans, lost in admiration of their surroundings, forgot to complain. For a short time they followed the course of a species of rivulet, clear as a spring, covered with a delicate net-work of creepers, and bordered by clumps of the amomum, with its scarlet fruit and yellow and white flower. The sun's rays flickered on the foliage and flowers, and sparkled in the rivulet. Suddenly the scene changed, and they came upon a clearing, rendered as green as a field in Normandy by the water which disappeared beneath it, and the leafy shade surrounding it on all sides. The Europeans and their escort halted here to rest, whilst the negroes disappeared in the thickets in search of elephant tracks.

After the lapse of half-an-hour, the scouts returned in a state of great excitement. The majority of them, without paying any attention to the strangers, fled in all directions towards the largest and loftiest trees, up which they swarmed with remarkable agility. Others, more mindful of their duty, ran to their guests, and told them that a very numerous herd of elephants was making for the clearing. Some said that there were a score of animals, male and female; others put the number down at a hundred, and a few went as far as to say that there were a thousand at least. This habit of exaggeration amongst the Africans is very

curious, and, without having the faintest notion of arithmetic, they are wonderfully expert in multiplication. Whilst making due allowance for their exaggeration, it was nevertheless certain that a tolerably numerous herd of elephants was approaching the spot selected for a halt.

"I propose," said Delange, "to leave the elephants to their own devices, and to take to our heels with these people."

"What!" exclaimed Miss Poles, indignantly. "We have the chance of looking upon a tableau possibly unique, and as soon as the curtain rises, we are to leave our seats!"

"My dear Miss Poles," said Périères, "allow me to remark that we have not visited Africa for the express purpose of hunting the elephant. We have a rather more noble end than that in view, and we have no right to waste our strength, or expose our lives, until that end has been attained."

"Nobody mentioned a word about hunting," replied the obstinate Englishwoman. "I labour under the impression that I am not quite a fool, and I certainly never dreamt of opposing an army of elephants. But we may, I imagine, remain here for a few moments without any risk, and have a look at our visitors. If they seem disposed to attack us, our horses will very soon carry us out of harm's way."

"It is all very well to say so," replied M. Périères, "but our horses could never gallop through this underwood; to walk through it would be as much as they could do just at present. The elephants, on the contrary, do not care one jot for thickets, trees, or thorns, and they would overtake us in a second, if they were to take it into their heads to pursue us."

"Your remarks are so far true, my dear Périères," said M. de Morin, who up to this time had refrained from giving any opinion, "that I do not intend to remount, having far more confidence in my own legs than in those of my steed."

"You are determined to stay here, then?" asked M. Delange.

"Certainly, if Madame de Gućran does not order me to move away."

"I assure you," said the Baroness, "that I should very much like to issue such an order, but it appears to me that it would be too late. Our horses are no longer intent on cropping the grass of the clearing. Their heads are all turned towards one point, their ears are pricked, and they are trembling in every limb. Their instinct tells them that a powerful enemy is advancing against them. See! they are careering off in all directions."

And so it was. The horses left, according

to the Arab custom, at liberty in the clearing, were galloping off.

"There is still time to beat a retreat," said M. Delange. "You know I am no coward, but in some cases courage is useless."

"Evidently so," added M. Périères.

Madame de Guéran raised her eyes to the last speaker, and in her look there was something akin to reproach, as if she were annoyed with M. Périères for siding with the Doctor and declining to face the danger.

She, doubtless, was in that frame of mind which renders women bold. She was, perhaps, feeling the false position she occupied towards these two men, both of whom adored her and were yearning to tell her so, but whose protestations she was bound to repress. She was asking herself whether the ordeal which she had imposed and they were undergoing was not beyond both their strength and hers. Possibly she went so far as to confess to herself that she was in imminent danger, with a gloomy future before her. Would it not be better for them, for her, and even for him whom she was anxious to rejoin, that the situation should be brought to a head without further delay, at that very moment, in the forest, on the spot where they now were? Why brave fresh dangers to which they would succumb sooner or later? Was it not better to die a sudden death in that lovely

scene than to waste away by inches from sickness and fatigue? At all events she could die now with an easy conscience, without remorse of any sort; could she answer for it that she would not in the immediate future have some weakness wherewith to reproach herself, some fault to deplore?

But all these thoughts we are, in our analytic character, ascribing to her, and which had, no doubt, occurred to her at some time or other, could scarcely have crossed her mind at this juncture, for she had scarcely raised her eyes to M. Périères in silent reproach at his desire to retreat, when that retreat became an impossibility, and the current of her ideas was rudely diverted into another channel.

From the other side of the clearing, rather more than two hundred yards from where the Europeans were standing, a loud, rushing noise was heard. It resembled the hoarse murmur of a tempestuous sea, the roaring of the waves, as impelled onwards by wind and tide they break on the rocks and engulf themselves in some vast cave. A continuous wail seemed to escape from the forest; the foliage, the very trees appeared to groan; all nature trembled and quivered in the air; flocks of birds, roused from their leafy nooks, flew screaming upwards; a herd of buffaloes, hidden hitherto in the long grass, sprang up with distended nostrils, and,

snorting in alarm, took to flight with an impetuous rush. At length the earth itself seemed to tremble under the enormous weight it had to bear, and fifty elephants, with heads up-reared above the brakes, laying low the tallest plants, were seen to emerge into the open.

CHAPTER X.

The elephants, apparently, had no idea of the proximity of any hunters. Lords of the land, monarchs of the country, and accustomed to see every denizen of the forest flee before them, the lion even included, for he never attacks them, they could not suspect that when they were assembled in so numerous a conclave, a few puny human beings would dare to question their territorial rights.

Having gained the clearing, whither they had wended their way, no doubt, for the purpose of seeking repose and relaxation, they broke their ranks, and, without the slightest symptom of fear or suspicion, they wandered at will in the tall grass. Some sought a green spot whereon to lie down, whilst others went in search of their wonted food, the foliage of the mimosa or arrouel, nick-named elephant's bread. Others, again, stopped wherever there was a pool, and, having pumped up the water with their trunks, squirted it all over themselves to wash off the dust and mud of the road, and the juveniles, infants of about sixty years of age, frisked hither and thither, flapping their huge ears in

token of enjoyment, entwining their trunks by way of showing their fraternal affection, or chasing each other in the open.

They made a terrible uproar, but all was silent around them—the forest was dumb, its denizens had fled, and Nature herself was, as it were, hushed.

The Europeans, their interpreters, and three men of the escort who had stood their ground, were huddled together in a small space in the clearing. Hidden in the tall grass, they were invisible, and no one spoke; prudence counselled silence, and wonder forbade all speech. Indeed, the scene which was unfolding itself before their eyes had in it somewhat of enchantment; those gigantic masses of black moved about in a sea of verdure, and cast huge shadows on all around; the rays of the sun lighted up their ebon skins, and imparted a metallic lustre to them; and their gleaming yellow-white tusks contrasted vividly with the prevailing tints of black and green. A serene, cloudless, deep blue sky spread itself out above the clearing, and, losing itself in the horizon, formed a magnificent curtain to the tableau. A species of quivering vapour, to be seen at mid-day in the tropics, rose from the earth, and rendered hazy the salient points of the surrounding scenery.

Nevertheless, in spite of their wondering admiration, the torpor produced by the

heated atmosphere, and the powerful perfumes exhaled from the flowers of the marsh, Madame de Guéran and her companions began to be seriously alarmed. The circular space, limited enough to begin with, in which the elephants were revelling in ease and enjoyment, grew wider and wider; one half of the plain, notwithstanding its large extent, was already occupied, and the pioneers of the herd, daring spirits, were straying in all directions and drawing every moment nearer to the Europeans.

"We have seen all we want to see," whispered M. Delange. "There is nothing to keep us here any longer. Suppose we go."

"My curiosity is satisfied, and I agree with you," said Miss Poles, in her most subdued voice. "But the noise we shall make in breaking through this tall grass on our way to the forest will attract the attention of the elephants. They will make for us, if only out of curiosity, and will trample us to death with the greatest ease."

"The same fate awaits us," replied M. Delange, "if we stay where we are. These animals are taking possession of the whole clearing by degrees, and in a very short time will reach us."

"Let us drive them away," said M. de Morin, getting close to his friends.

They all in silence questioned him by a look, for none of them saw his drift.

"We have nine guns in our possession," resumed M. de Morin, "without counting the two revolvers in the ladies' hands. That is more than we need to get rid of these unfortunate visitors."

"What do you mean? Do you want us to attack fifty elephants of their calibre?" exclaimed M. Delange. "It would be madness."

"Who said anything about attacking them? I only want to frighten them. We will fire in the air, and I will lay any wager you like that they will all take to flight."

"And if they fly in our direction?"

"Impossible. The first impulse of all animals, whatever they be, is, when they are alarmed, to rush off by the way that they came."

A consultation, *sotto voce*, was held for some moments, but the enemy drew nearer and nearer, and as retreat was out of the question, seeing that it would have led to a pursuit, it was resolved that the advice of M. de Morin should be followed.

At a given signal the nine rifles and two revolvers were simultaneously fired in the air.

The elephants raised their heads, ceased their gambols, and, collecting themselves together in haste, formed in a mass at one spot in the clearing, and appeared to deliberate.

A momentary pause, a terrible suspense for the hunters, ensued. They were lost, condemned to death without the power of appeal,

crushed in an instant, if the enemy resolved to charge and the living avalanche should burst forth in their direction.

Whilst they thus awaited the verdict of death or acquittal, the bravest hearts quailed. The three young men, despite all their courage, turned pale. Miss Poles clung to M. Delange, as if resolved to die with him. Madame de Guéran was, perhaps, the only one who trembled not.

The interpreter and soldiers were lying flat on the ground, making themselves as small as possible, so as to pass unseen, whilst Joseph, anthematizing the superfluous flesh which frustrated all attempts at invisibility, fell on his knees, with arms outstretched and eyes upraised to Heaven.

Suddenly, one of the elephants, the Nestor of the herd, the most experienced and most respected, forced a passage through the midst of his companions, and made off towards the forest. The others followed him.

The danger was disappearing, and M. de Morin triumphed.

Two of the beasts, however, of apparently energetic and independent character, declined to follow the example of their comrades. Possibly, they had already become acquainted with fire-arms, or had had some previous encounter with hunters, and wanted to pay off an outstanding score, to satiate a resuscitated

longing for vengeance—who can tell? They not only declined to flee, but they looked round about attentively, whisking their trunks to and fro after a very menacing fashion, and giving utterance to shrill trumpetings.

They were two magnificent males, about ten feet high, and armed with gigantic tusks. After having looked all round the clearing, and at the moment when the Europeans, expecting to see them rush towards their hiding place, had taken a careful aim, and were preparing to fire, the huge beasts bent their steps towards a large mimosa, which grew about a hundred yards from the spot where the hunters were.

When they got to the foot of the tree they stopped, reaching up with their trunks, and endeavouring to crop the foliage. In this they could not succeed, for the mimosa was more than thirty feet high, and its branches only commenced to shoot out from its top.

Then were heard their screams of rage, echoed by cries of terror, which were uttered by one of those blacks who, half-an-hour previously, had announced the approach of the enemy and had fled in all directions. The unfortunate man had taken refuge in the mimosa, and the two elephants had just discovered him.

When they saw that their trunks would not reach the foliage, they decided upon uprooting the tree, and, thanks to their marvellous instinct, they set about one of those extraordinary

operations, of which Jules Poncet, the famous elephant hunter, was a frequent witness. One of them went down on his knees at the foot of the mimosa, buried his tusk in the ground amongst the roots, as if he were placing a battering ram in position there, and slowly raised his massive head, his comrade, meanwhile, encircling the stem with his trunk, shaking it violently, and dragging it by degrees towards himself.

A few seconds sufficed to bend down the gigantic tree, and with it fell the man, who, if indeed he breathed after his terrible fall, was destined to inevitable death beneath the feet of his enemies.

The Europeans could no longer remain passive; they took aim, and fired simultaneously. Every shot told, but not one was mortal.

In fact, except from the streams of blood which flowed from their wounds, it was impossible to discover that they were hit, for they continued their work, without turning towards the hunters, but uttering all the time shrill and prolonged screams.

Then MM. de Morin and Périères unhesitatingly advanced a few yards into the open and fired a second time.

The elephant, whose trunk was round the tree, fell in a heap with a bullet in his breast. The other, whose tusk was buried amongst the mimosa roots, made a supreme effort, and, the

tree, uprooted, after having described a circle in the air, fell on the ground.

Then the enraged animal, now free to work his will, rushed with uplifted trunk to the top of the fallen tree, and, ransacking the foliage, seized the negro and crushed him beneath his feet.

But his rage was not appeased, and now it was directed towards the Europeans.

MM. Périères and de Morin, as soon as they saw that the negro was dead, rejoined Madame de Guéran, and ceased firing, wishing to keep their cartridges to defend themselves and make a last attempt to conquer their almost invulnerable enemy.

The animal had turned once more toward the hunters, whom the high grass, now trampled down, no longer hid from his view. His body, once black as ebony, had become red; the blood welled from out his wounds, and, after coursing down his limbs, trickled on the grass of the clearing, and formed a rivulet of blood. His ears, cut to ribands by the bullets, lay flat along his body. His trunk alone had escaped, but he was incessantly touching his wounds with it, as if to stanch them and ease his pain, and each time he withdrew it it was covered with blood. His shrill trumpetings awoke the echoes of the forest, and must have struck terror into the inhabitants of it. At length, with a terrible

scream, more appalling than all the others, he rushed towards the spot where the Europeans had taken refuge.

They fired their last remaining cartridges.

The elephant stopped, appeared to waver for an instant, and then resumed his course.

CHAPTER XI.

When, a quarter of an hour previously, the first elephant had been seen to fall, and the second, bent on vengeance, had continued his work of uprooting the tree, MM. Périères and de Morin had imperatively ordered their companions to take to flight, and scatter themselves in the forest or the clearing. The Arab interpreter and the Dinka soldiers obeyed him; as for Joseph, he had anticipated his master's orders.

M. Delange was desirous of remaining with his friends, but he had been made to understand that, as he was rather a bad shot, his rifle would be of more use in the hands of M. Périères or M. de Morin. In addition to this, if he refused to take himself off, Miss Beatrice Poles, who for the time being appeared inclined to exhibit a marked preference for him, would be loth to leave him, and it was necessary to get rid of her. This coquettish Englishwoman had, in order to make a startling impression on the colour-loving blacks, for some days past endued herself in a skirt of brilliant red, to which, by way of contrast, she had added the

bluest of blue veils, and as the African elephant, like the bull of Spain, is driven wild with rage by garments of too vivid a hue, M. Delange, at the earnest request of his friends, and for the common safety, including that of the intrepid Miss Poles herself, withdrew with her to a convenient distance.

Madame de Guéran alone declined positively to seek safety in flight, and expressed her determination to share the fate of MM. de Morin and Périères. She maintained that she had no right to leave them in the hour of danger, and she affected to believe, with some show of reason, that they would defend themselves all the better if they had at the same time to protect her.

Consequently Madame de Guéran and her two friends, alone, were exposed to the elephant's attack. Notwithstanding his numerous wounds, the animal came impetuously on, and his strength did not appear to be failing him. As for his rage, it knew no bounds.

MM. de Morin and Périeres, as we have already said, had fired away their last cartridge, and all they had to do now, as the time for flight was past and gone, was to await the onslaught of the elephant, as calmly as they could, trusting to their hunting knives to rid them of their assailant.

Laura de Guéran, whom they had placed

between them, stood motionless and calm, her mouth half open, and her eyes fixed firmly on the advancing foe. She was marvellously lovely at that moment, and her two champions, in spite of the fact that death was staring them in the face, could not help looking at her with admiration. They seemed as if they were enjoying the prospect of dying by the side of her they loved, hand in hand, their eyes fixed on her's, joined to her in death.

The elephant rushed straight on, without wavering or deviating from his course, and already his three victims were flecked with the blood which he tossed into the air with his trunk, and which fell like rain drops in front of him. He no longer appeared to their affrighted eyes to belong to this world. He was some nameless monster, some supernatural mammoth, against whom mortals could not contend.

Suddenly the ground shook beneath them, as if struck by an enormous mass of rock which, loosened from a neighbouring mountain, had rolled impetuously down and buried itself at their feet.

The elephant, weakened by loss of blood, mortally wounded by the last shots fired at him, and, for some moments past, sustained merely by his angry rage, had fallen prone to the ground, at the very instant when his vengeance was on the point of being satisfied.

For a moment Madame de Guéran, M. Périères, and M. de Morin remained almost in a state of stupefaction. Death had been so near to them that they doubted the fact of their own existence. It seemed impossible that they could have been saved so miraculously, and yet they were alive. And there, too, lay their enemy, so formidable, not a moment since, but now powerless, motionless, dead. His screams no longer filled the air, his tread no longer shook the ground, his life-blood was running in streams on the ground, and already formed an ensanguined pool around the Europeans.

And now, from all sides, there was a general rush to rejoin them and wish them joy of their deliverance, Miss Poles and M. Delange being the first to arrive. Notwithstanding the entreaties of MM. de Morin and Périères, they had not gone far away, but had halted in a neighbouring thicket, ready to die in their turn, if the elephant had sacrificed his first victims.

The fears she had entertained for her own safety and that of her companions, and her *tête-à-tête* with M. Delange, at a time when their hearts were stirred with no ordinary emotion, had, as it were, softened Miss Poles. Her step was not so determined, her long neck had lost its stiffness, and her head was inclined towards the Doctor, ready to find a resting-place on his shoulder. Her very look, toned down by her

blue spectacles, had in it somewhat of languor and indecision, as if she were regretting that she had once more returned to earth, instead of having taken to herself wings to fly with M. Delange to realms above.

The hunting party was once more complete, with the sole exception of Joseph, who had not answered to the summons to reassemble. Where had he hidden himself? That was a question which nobody could answer. He could not have taken refuge in the depths of the forest; he was too great a coward for that. Had he sought an asylum in some tree? That hypothesis was scouted at once, for his corpulence, and his absolute incapacity for anything approaching to agility, put any such gymnastic exercises out of the question.

For ten minutes he was shouted for in all directions, and real fears for his safety were making themselves felt, when he appeared, looking, for all the world, as if he were a victim to St. Vitus's dance, practising the most extraordinary contortions, raising his arms, only to let them fall again, and beating his shoulders, his chest, his legs, and even his too conspicuous stomach. Every now and then he gave himself a violent shake, just as a dog does when he comes out of the water. There was, nevertheless, no sign of damp about him; his white blouse looked perfectly dry; only it was dotted

over with reddish blotches, which moved about and seemed alive. Not content with this gymnastic frenzy, he uttered a series of agonizing cries, not quite so terrible as those of the elephants, but far more shrill and discordant.

A general rush was made towards him, and it was then seen that he was being eaten alive by an army of red ants, the plague of Africa. They were swarming all over him, in knots or clusters, finding their way even into his beard and hair. They settled on his face, in his ears, crept down his neck and under his clothes, and, not satisfied with mere curiosity, were biting him viciously, tearing his flesh, and burying themselves in his skin.

When, an hour previously, he had run away, he did not know what direction to take. He was afraid of the forest because it was so dark, he dreaded the thickets on account of the thorns, and he shirked the long grass as not offering a refuge sufficiently sure. He was running here and there, having completely lost his head, when he caught sight of a hillock, about a yard high and three yards broad, near a tree. Towards this he plunged, head downwards, thinking, like the ostrich, that if he hid his head nobody would see him. Moreover, he thought he would be completely concealed behind the hillock, but, alas! as soon as he set

foot on it it gave way, as if it were liquid, and in an instant Joseph disappeared from view.

He had, unfortunately, stumbled on one of those extensive ant hills which abound in the forests, in the midst of the high grass and always at the foot of a tree. All those who have travelled in equatorial Africa complain of these ants, of which there are some twenty species. Livingstone says that they do not know what fear is, and that they attack all animals, large and small, with equal fury. The Marquis de Compiégne, who died recently at Cairo, calls them *bashikouais*, and says that their nippers are like the hooks used in gudgeon fishing, and that they bite so viciously that, as a rule, their bodies alone can be pulled away; their heads remain in the wound.

Happily for Joseph the majority of the blacks are very partial to these termites. They fry or boil them, mixing them with grains of durra or eleusine, and eat them out of the palms of their hands with the greatest gusto. Consequently, the natives seized on Joseph with the double object of ridding him of his enemies and appeasing their own appetites. They carried their courtesy so far as to drag M. de Morin's valet behind a tree and strip him, first of all shaking out his clothes, and then reaping a second harvest from off his body. The spoil was then

collected in a basket and reserved for the evening meal.

But night was coming on apace. It was absolutely necessary to gain the edge of the forest with all speed and seek a resting place for the night, and so the Europeans, preceded by their escort, set out on their return.

CHAPTER XII.

Towards seven o'clock they reached a village where shelter was offered them, and after a meal, of which the elephants killed during the day formed the standing dish, they were glad to seek repose in a tolerably roomy hut, placed at their disposal by the chief of the district.

Joseph was the only one who did not pursue this course of inaction. He could not console himself for not being able to take back with him to France, at all events as a trophy or souvenir of the hunt in which he had taken so active a part, the tusks of the elephant which had been handed over to the blacks. So, as soon as his masters had retired within their dwelling, made of wood and branches of trees, he set out in search of the interpreter Omar, and asked him to act as his agent in coming to some agreement with the natives. He offered them, in exchange for the longed-for tusks, five copper bracelets and some necklets of red pearls, with which he had taken care to provide himself.

The natives, after consulting together, declined both pearls and bracelets, but said that they would swop their tusks for guns. They

had, during the day, arrived at a just appreciation of the power of fire-arms, and they hoped, with their aid, to become masters of the forest, to destroy the elephants wholesale, and thus to attain to speedy wealth. Joseph clinched the bargain, and it was agreed that if they brought the coveted tusks to the Meshera at Rek, he would hand over the guns they asked for. He had bought in Paris, for about ten francs a piece, a dozen old muskets, and he did a capital stroke of business, seeing that each tusk represented to him an average value of five hundred francs. Elated with the success of his first commercial speculation, he betook himself to rest, after having been rubbed all over with palm oil as a cure for the bites which the ants had inflicted on him.

On the following day the little band re-entered Port Rek, where Nassar had taken advantage of their absence to complete the caravan by engaging about a hundred and fifty bearers belonging to various tribes. These men were, for the most part, fine, stalwart fellows, between twenty and thirty years of age. Round the waist they wore a strip of calico, and the rest of their bodies was covered with ornaments of all sorts, brass, copper, ivory, and iron, the Nubians also wearing on their breasts amulets in the shape of small leathern bags, in which were placed some of the precepts of the Koran. In addition to these appendages each

man carried a knife, a small scimitar, a bag containing his allowance of grain, and the wooden stool used for a seat, for the natives of the greater portion of the black continent never condescend to sit on the ground. As a rule these caravans are encumbered with a crowd of women, slaves or free, brought by the soldiers and bearers; but Nassar had, by a display of great firmness, curtailed this following to the narrowest limits, a few Soudan women alone having obtained permission to join their companions from Khartoum.

The caravan left Port Rek on the 14th February, 1873, and formed an imposing line of about three hundred and fifty persons, distributed in the following manner:—At the head marched Nassar, the guide, clothed, according to his own particular fancy, in a sort of scarlet tunic, and wearing a pair of huge leather boots, which were a source of great pride to him, although, from his not being accustomed to their use, they were productive of considerable inconvenience. These boots were the admiration of all the negroes, and contributed, in no slight degree, to inspire them with profound respect for the guide. With his head in the air, surmounted by a plume, and a set expression on his face, he looked as if he were about to pose as a *cavalier seul* in a quadrille at a masked ball. In one hand he carried a carbine, and in the other the banner of the

caravan, ornamented with a crescent and certain precepts of the Koran inscribed thereon in red letters. It would be vain for any European to attempt, in certain regions of Africa, to unfurl his national flag; the Nubians would refuse to follow him. They have no objection to serve a Christian, but on the express condition that they shall be protected by the standard of Islam.

Musicians marched on either side of the guide, beating their drums, clanging their cymbals, or clumsily blowing their cracked trumpets. This music, barbarous enough to European ears, is full of sweetness to the negroes. Baker says, in one of his works, that any traveller who would play persistently on the cornet, could traverse in perfect safety the whole of Central Africa. If he could go to the extravagance of a barrel organ, furnished with the entire repertoire of the Bouffes or the Renaissance, he would assuredly be followed by an enthusiastic crowd, and, protected by this dancing, ever-changing escort, he would be able to pass through the most hostile districts.

Behind the band came the soldiers, about forty in number, the remaining ten forming the rear-guard. Although they were innocent of boots, they marched as proudly as Nassar, gun on shoulder and lance in hand. They did not keep any sort of order, but constantly left the ranks, at the same time affecting to hold no

communication whatever with the black bearers, whom they look upon as inferior beings.

Between the soldiers and the bearers a space was reserved for the Europeans, all of whom were on horseback, except Miss Beatrice Poles, whose prodigious feet resumed their wonted office, and Joseph, who was mounted on a donkey. A species of palanquin on two poles, and carried by four men, was set apart for Madame de Guéran, but it was very rarely that she made use of it. She was too energetic and active to ensconce herself under the mosquito curtains of this travelling bed. On horseback or on foot, she went from one point to another, hastening the onward march, giving advice to one and encouragement to another, asking after the health of some woman who appeared to walk with difficulty, interposing when any quarrelling was going on, and rendering herself of use to all. Thanks to this activity of mind and body, she did not notice that the caravan, as is usual, advanced at a rate not exceeding from two miles and a half to three miles an hour, and that in a mild atmosphere and with easy loads.

The servants followed their masters. First of all came the two interpreters, Omar and Ali, on horseback like their employers, because their assistance might be needed at any moment. To these succeeded the attendants of both sexes, Arabs, Nubians, and others hailing from Khar-

toum and the Soudan, laden with clothes, guns, ammunition, boxes of medicines, and eatables for their masters and mistresses. The Soudan girls, young and pretty, and dressed in red and white tunics, presented to them by Madame de Guéran, formed a picturesque and charming battalion by themselves. They did not appear to feel the weight of their burdens, for from time to time they turned a side-long glance on MM. Périères and de Morin, handsome men both, and to them the very incarnation of manly beauty. But these cavaliers, when not riding on in front, were ever close to Madame de Guéran, and they had no eyes for anybody else. So the fair damsels of the Soudan contented themselves with ogling M. Delange, who, braving the sighs and nudges of Miss Poles, returned their laughing glances with interest.

The bearers, properly so called, hired partly at Khartoum, but principally at Port Rek, marched next, two by two when the path was narrow, but any way they pleased when there was more room. These carried the bulk of the baggage, including all the various articles destined for presents or as payment for provisions, all of which were under the special charge of M. Delange.

Then came some Nubian women, and about a score of juvenile blacks, to whom were entrusted the care of the cattle, purchased from the Baggaras and used as beasts of burden

until the necessity should arrive for converting them into food. This necessity, it was hoped, was far distant, for other animals there were none, except the horses and Joseph's donkey, and these might succumb to the climate at any moment. In that case the Europeans, if tired or sick, would be only too glad to get on the back of some complaisant bullock or amiable cow.

Last of all came ten soldiers of the escort, taken according to a rôster from the company in front. These formed the rear-guard, whose duty it was to hurry on the laggards and prevent desertions. This latter evil is especially to be feared in case of meeting with a caravan returning from the interior towards the Nile. The African is passionately attached to his native soil, and notwithstanding the loss of the promised wages and the certainty of punishment, he is frequently seized with the desire to abandon his masters on the onward march, and turn back with the new-comers for the purpose of regaining his home as soon as possible. During the night there are no desertions, for fear of wild beasts and especially of Zomby, the "bogey" of the blacks, but in the daytime a cleft in a rock or a convenient thicket is adroitly seized upon as a means of escape. Pursuit is useless, because home-sickness sharpens the wits of the fugitives and makes them clever at concealment.

The owners take little notice of these desertions so long as they are solitary and a free man is the delinquent, but they are in a terrible state if a slave takes to flight. If they themselves have been slaves, or if they are in an inferior position, their anger knows no bounds. The man or woman purchased out of their savings, at the cost of great privations, becomes their property, their chattel. The feeling of proprietorship, very strongly developed amongst them, renders them furious, and the Europeans were destined to find this out before the end of their second day's march.

CHAPTER XIII.

M. Périères was riding on the flank of the column when his eyes fell on a man of the rear-guard, whose arms and hands were covered with blood. He thought he was wounded, and, going up to him, asked him how it had happened.

"I am not wounded," sulkily replied the Nubian.

"How, then, come your hands to be covered with blood?"

"It is my slave's blood, not mine."

"Your slave! You have a slave? Who gave her to you, or where did you get hold of her?"

"I bought her," replied the soldier, with an air of pride.

"Since we started? In that case you have been guilty of disobedience to orders. We have expressly forbidden all traffic in slaves as far as this caravan is concerned."

"I have not disobeyed your orders. The woman was mine long ago; she had accompanied me in many of my expeditions, and Nassar allowed me to bring her with me."

"Where is she?"

"Down there, in that thicket we have just passed."

"Why does she stay behind? You have been ill-using her, I suppose."

"No; I have cut her head off," replied the soldier, quite simply, as if the beheading of a slave were the most natural thing in the world.

"Wretch!" exclaimed M. Périères, seizing him by the arm, and compelling him to stop.

The Nubian did not in the least understand this indignation. He possessed a slave who was bound to follow him, to carry his baggage, grind his corn, and work for him during the journey.

This woman ran away, and, as it was a first offence, he contented himself with thrashing her; on the following day she ran away again, and then he killed her, feeling convinced that, if he spared her life, she would abscond once more, and his property would pass from him to somebody else.

M. Périères ordered a general halt whilst he sent the two interpreters to the thicket pointed out by the Nubian, with orders to find out whether the slave were really killed, and, if so, to bury her.

Omar and Ali returned very quickly with the intelligence that they had found the corpse at the place indicated.

The Europeans then held a consultation, and decided that the culprit should receive a hundred lashes on the spot, in sight of the whole caravan.

But the punishment alone was not enough; it was necessary to explain why it was inflicted. The Arabs and Nubians could never have understood that any one of them ought to be chastised for simply, as in this case, making away with his own property.

The interpreters were, therefore, to explain generally that the soldier had been punished for shedding the blood, not of his slave, but of a member of the expedition, and that for the future the crime of murder, under whatever circumstances it might be committed, would carry with it the penalty of death.

Having thus established a precedent and promulgated a law, the caravan moved on.

Beginning the day at about four o'clock in the morning, the bearers had enough of it by noon, so that at that hour, and sometimes earlier, the halting-place for the night was reached. As a rule the Europeans, except when the stages of the journey happened to have been more than ordinarily long, did not retire to rest before nine or ten o'clock, the evening being occupied in chatting about their plans, questioning Nassar as to what had gone on during the day, and arranging the route for the morrow.

Madame de Guéran was the life and soul

of these evenings, and when she chanced to retire early, everybody followed her example except MM. de Morin and Delange, who seized that opportunity of devoting themselves to écarté, bezique, or piquet. They had played about a hundred *parties*, and were quits, as far as play during the journey was concerned. The back debt remained at the same figure; the Doctor could not achieve any reduction in his floating liability, but at all events, it did not increase, and his bad luck was not sticking to him as it had done in Paris. Consequently he looked hopefully forward to the future, and, so far from being in despair about wiping off the old score, he thought he had the chance of turning the balance considerably in his own favour. This prospect enabled him to put up with the monotony of the journey, and kept him in good spirits.

Though he thought Madame de Guéran everything that was charming, he had the good sense to understand that falling in love with her would be mere waste of time. He was careful, therefore, not to follow in the footsteps of his friends, and, in the hours of relaxation he devoted himself to sentimental conversation with Miss Beatrice Poles, taking care, with his habitual prudence, not to look at her lest her physical aspect should detract from her moral and intellectual qualities.

CHAPTER XIV.

M. Périères, not caring about the society of Miss Beatrice Poles, and abandoned both by Madame de Guéran, who had retired for the night, and by the two inveterate gamblers, took advantage of his isolation to jot down his impressions of the journey. He kept the journal of the expedition, and it is to him, and the information given to us by him, that we owe the greater portion of our information.

At each halting-place, the sort of register kept by M. Périères was placed by him on the camp bedstead in his hut, and in it everybody was at liberty to enter his or her notes, ideas, or reflections. All communications were anonymous; but this mingling of ideas, the various modes of regarding events, the detached phrases and the different circumstances recorded by the several reporters imparted a tone of originality to the journal.

We do not intend to transcribe this register literally, but merely to extract from it a few details of interest, and to follow generally the route taken by the caravan, without stop-

ping with it at every straggling village through which it passed.

To these notes of the journey, written indiscriminately, under the direction of the chief editor, M. Périères, we shall occasionally add a page or two of more private information due to the pen of one or other of the travellers. Accident has placed in our possession these leaves, torn out, as it were, from the private note-books of the expedition, and we do not think we are guilty of any indiscretion in giving publicity to them.

March, 1873.—For two days we have been passing through the western portion of the territory inhabited by the Dinkas, a numerous people, not only dwelling on the right bank of the White River, but divided as well into various tribes scattered southward of the Gazelle River. To our guide, Nassar, and most of the soldiers this district was quite familiar, and we dreaded lest they should suddenly leave us in the lurch for the peace and quietness of private life.

The habits of these tribes we find to be very similar to what we had already seen. The Dinka, like the Shillook and the Nuehr, plasters his face and body with cinders, but when he does condescend to divest himself of this detestable coating, by taking a bath or smearing himself with oil, his skin has the sheen and polish of dark bronze.

The Dinka betrays his nationality as soon as he opens his mouth, for the incisor teeth of the lower jaw are invariably broken off, a rigidly-observed custom or fashion, the object of which it is impossible to determine.

The male Dinka, too, despises clothing and never puts any on except he is obliged, as, for instance, when accompanying a caravan such as ours. The females, on the other hand, are more scrupulously clothed than all the other black women of the interior, two aprons of untanned skin covering them, before and behind, from the hips to the ankles.

Tattooing is confined to the men, and consists of ten lines, radiating from the base of the nose to the forehead and temple. Heavy rings of ivory, bracelets of hippopotamus hide, and the tails of cows and goats also contribute to the adornment of this tribe.

Extreme cleanliness marks the interior of their dwellings, and fleas and vermin are very rarely met with in this part of Africa. Possibly these insects have a wholesome dread of the snakes, which live on most intimate terms with the Dinkas, who pay them a sort of reverence. Frequently they are treated like domestic animals and called by name, and their slaughter is looked upon as a crime. This veneration for snakes has been inculcated by the priests and sorcerers, who are skilled in the science of

divination, in enchantments, and even in ventriloquism.

5th March.—We have just said good-bye to the inhabitants of Kudy, one of the last villages belonging to the Dinkas, and we have every reason to congratulate ourselves on the manner in which the caravan has been treated. We quitted them on excellent terms, after having procured a supply of milk and fruit, and several couple of oxen, in exchange for iron-wire.

But, scarcely had we proceeded a mile on our way to the next halting-place than we saw a whole swarm of natives rushing towards us, apparently in a dreadful rage, menacing us with their ebony clubs and barbed lances, the only weapons they know, and formidable ones they are in their hands.

CHAPTER XV.

Instead of hastening the speed of the caravan and fleeing before the armed and threatening host advancing against us, the order was at once given to halt and make ready to give them a warm reception. The interpreters at the same time went down the ranks of the soldiers, and warned them not to fire unless we were attacked.

This arrangement made, Nassar and several Dinkas, who had been hired by us, went to meet their fellow-countrymen for the purpose of finding out the reason of the hostile display.

After the lapse of a quarter of an hour our guide rejoined us with the information that the natives accused us of having abused their hospitality by carrying off into slavery two young girls of their village, relatives of the chief. The absence of these girls had been discovered a few moments after our departure, and the whole of the inhabitants at once set off in pursuit.

What is the meaning of the accusation? Which of the escort has dared to infringe our rules and compromise us in this fashion?

Where are the women? They might be concealed, possibly, from us in the midst of some more or less compact knot of our followers, and their cries might be prevented by gags, but we are now forewarned, and discovery cannot fail to be a very simple matter.

Nassar once more approached the crowd, and declared, in our name, that if the two women were really with the caravan they should be given up at once. At the same time de Morin ordered all the soldiers and bearers, as well as the women who accompanied them, to form up in single file. When this was done, we inspected the whole line, and as each face was already familiar to us, we should soon have detected any sign of uneasiness.

The inspection passed off without our having been able to find the missing girls, and there was evidently a mistake somewhere. These two Dinka ladies must have absconded of their own free will, and, as all caravans are in bad repute, ours is accused of abduction. At my request, several of the Dinkas have joined us, and can see for themselves that their absent countrywomen are not with us.

Suddenly, a fine young fellow, about twenty years of age, who had been pointed out to us as the affianced lover of one of the runaways, made a bound over the heads of the bearers drawn up in front of us, lighted in the midst of

the baggage, and sprang towards a tent which was wrapped round the pole belonging to it. Several of our Nubians left the ranks and wanted to send him away, when Delange, who happened to be close by, interfered and ordered our people to fall back and allow the Dinka to do whatever be liked. The black thereupon took hold of the knife hanging from his waist-belt, cut the cord of the tent, and lo! there appeared his beloved *fiancée*. He drew her to him, embraced her fondly, and then taking her on his shoulders, he made his way through our ranks again, and rejoined his fellow countrymen, who gave him a most enthusiastic welcome.

As soon as the man had taken his departure Delange cut the cord of another tent, and set free the second prisoner, to whom the Dinka, satisfied with the recovery of his lady-love, had not given a thought. This woman, as soon as she was liberated, rubbed her eyes, dazzled by the glare of the sun, looked round her with astonishment, saw the people of her tribe, and went towards them without the slightest hesitation. It was, consequently, very evident that these two women had not left their country of their own free will, neither had they found a voluntary concealment in the tents. They must have been carried off by main force by some of our people, and imprisoned in such a manner that they could

neither be seen nor heard. This abduction is all the more annoying to us because we are looked upon as the accomplices of our servants. To save our honour as Europeans, and free ourselves from all responsibility, we must discover the culprits and punish them. To arrive at this result it is only necessary to summon the bearers of the two tents to appear. Somebody must have noticed that they lacked their wonted activity, that the tents had in them some weighty, moving objects, and the silence of these men, and their willingness to carry an excessive load pointed them out clearly as either the authors or the abettors of the abduction.

We were destined, when questioning them, to make a further and more disgraceful discovery. The bearers of these tents are only paid accomplices, deluded wretches, and to reach the real culprit, we must raise our eyes higher and search our own ranks.

Alas! he belongs to the European colony, he is as white as we are, made almost after our own image. It is Joseph!

The bearers, when threatened with the whip, confessed that M. de Morin's servant had given them three pearl necklets and some iron rings, to seize upon the two girls, stifle their cries, swaddle them in a tent, and carry them off. Joseph thought that the two captives, converted

for the nonce into bales of goods, would disappear without being noticed, that he would unpack them on the following day, as soon as the caravan reached another district, and that he would thus have got possession of two slaves, destined either to be exchanged for elephant's tusks, or to prepare his turtle soup, for which the Dinka women, who are excellent cooks, are renowned.

Joseph was summoned. He at first attempted to deny everything, and accused the bearers of wishing to lower him in the eyes of his masters. But he soon became confused, contradicted himself, and finally, when found out in a lie, confessed all.

The next question was, what punishment to inflict ? Our first thought was to transfer to him the thrashing destined for his accomplices, and he richly deserved it. But we were afraid of diminishing the *prestige* attaching to all white men, whatever their position, if we inflicted corporal punishment on an European, and after consultation, it was resolved that Joseph, to expiate his crime, should make the remainder of the journey on foot—in other words, that he should at once dismount from his donkey. In addition, he was sentenced to hand over the animal to the two Dinka women by way of compensation for the inconvenience he had caused them.

Joseph made some demur at this, but de Morin told him plainly that if he did not at once do as he was bid, he should be given up to the people he had outraged. This threat had an immediate effect. Joseph trotted off on his donkey, and, dismounting, presented his steed to his former prisoners.

This present filled the two women with joy. They rushed to the donkey and covered it with caresses, and, then, from its neck they passed to that of their abductor, and embraced him as only negresses know how.

As soon as he could disengage himself from their arms, Joseph dragged himself, or rather rolled towards us, lamenting loudly his demonstrative slaves and his patient ass. The latter, on the contrary, comprehending that he had got rid of his bulky rider, set to work to bray for joy. The Dinkas, who are clever at imitating the cries of animals, joined in the chorus with the donkey, the drums of the caravan beat, the cymbals clanged, the trumpets sounded, and, with every good wish from the natives, once more our friends, we again set out on our southward way.

Our route brought us into the midst of a small tribe, forming an isolated community amongst the powerful surrounding tribes. These people, to whom our interpreters gave the name of Alwaj, inhabit a large forest, frequented by giraffes,

monkeys and elephants, and in this forest we were destined to witness one of their punishments, of which, notwithstanding the horror inspired by the mere recollection, we are bound, as faithful historians, to give some account.

CHAPTER XVI.

We had just quitted the front of the Al-waj. It was ten o'clock in the morning, and we had to cross a vast plain in order to reach our next halting-place. The heat was oppressive in the extreme, as if a storm were brewing, although the sky was cloudless. The sun, as if foreseeing that a veil would soon be interposed between him and the earth, that the rainy season was coming on, and that he would no longer be sole monarch of these districts, was darting his most burning rays. We were weary, almost done up, and as we went slowly forward, we kept close together in the vain hope of affording each other some sort of shade.

In the midst of this barren, parched, and arid plain we unexpectedly caught sight of a leafless tree, whose branches had been lopped off so completely, that nothing but a post was left. Bound closely to this tree, with his face to the sun, we perceived a human being. De Morin and Delange galloped off at once, and stopped short at the tree in astonishment at the sight which met their gaze.

A man, about twenty years of age and com-

pletely naked, was bound to the tree. His features were regular and gave token of great energy of character, his eyes had a very peculiar expression in them, and his smile was somewhat sardonic. An artistic statue in bronze, modelled by a master hand, alone could give any just idea of his splendid proportions and the lustre of his dark brown, almost metallic skin. In spite of his bonds, his attitude was noble, he stood firmly and upright, with expanded chest, and uplifted head.

Followed by our two interpreters and some of the Al-waj, who had been engaged as guides as far as the next halt, I rejoined de Morin and Delange, and with one consent we made ready to cut the captive's bonds. The natives at once came up to us and indulged us with a vehement harangue, the sense of which we were fain to obtain from our interpreters.

According to their account, the man whom we wished to rescue was a poisoner, belonging to the Baggara tribe, whose acquaintance we had made when coming from Khartoum up the Nile. Taken prisoner by some dealers on their way to the south, he had in the preceding year been sold to one of the chiefs of the Al-waj. Soon afterwards the chief, together with all his family and more than ten members of the tribe, had died from the effects of poison, and, suspicion having rested on the slave, he was condemned to death from the sun.

This punishment, of which we now heard for the first time, is of the most simple description, and it may well be asked how it is that it is not more widely known in the tropics or at the equator, for, of course, in Europe, especially in the north, it would not be very efficacious.

It consists merely of fastening the criminal in the middle of a plain, and there leaving him without the power of moving, to be burnt at a slow fire, or, to speak more correctly, by a quick sun, in the simplest possible manner, without appliances of any kind, and without any expense in the shape of stake or faggots.

The Al-waj, like true artists, introduce a certain amount of refinement into the punishment they have thus devised, for lest it should not last long enough, or lest the prisoner should die too speedily from sun-stroke, they cover his head with leaves. The skull and forehead, the most vulnerable parts, are thus protected, but all the rest of the body burns to a cinder, and gradually dries up. The skin is not long before it peels off, and the sun darts his pitiless rays upon the quivering flesh.

It may possibly be said that, notwithstanding these precautions, the punishment cannot be of very long duration. Abandoned by all, riven to his post, the slave would certainly die of hunger and thrist before the sun would kill him. They who would argue thus do not know the Al-waj. They do not so abandon the criminal,

but, on the contrary, pay him every attention. Each day, when the sun has lost his power, and they themselves no longer dread his rays, they bring their prisoner a few grains and a drop or two of water, thus prolonging his existence, and condemning him to die by the sun alone, according to their decree.

These explanations, so far from inducing us to give up our ideas of mercy, made us more persistent. It is, perhaps, both imprudent and indiscreet to turn a poisoner loose on society, even if that society be African, and if it were merely a question of hanging or beheading, we should probably allow justice to take its course. But the sufferings the poor wretch endures and those which are in store for him, the very horror of his punishment, all render his crime less odious. In the victim we forget the criminal.

Armed with our knives we were again preparing to cut the prisoner's bonds, without condescending to pay any attention to the protests or remonstrances of the Al-Waj, when our interpreter Ali called our attention to the sky.

"Well," said Delange, to him. "What part does the sky play in this matter? Are you afraid that the sun will resent our depriving him of his victim? He never asked for him—no offer even was made to him."

"That is not what I meant," replied our guide. "I pointed to the sky, because at this moment it is covered with clouds. A storm

will soon burst over us, the rain will fall in torrents, and as the prisoner will be saved by natural causes it is of no use our making enemies of all this tribe."

"Granted," said Delange. "The sun will be interrupted in his work of destruction. The rain will refresh this poor wretch, and will wash his wounds. I admit all that, but the luminary will soon reappear brighter and more burning than ever."

"The punishment will soon be at an end." our guide hastened to explain, "in accordance with the customs of the tribes of these regions. They have been suffering for some time past from a terrible drought, and the rains, which usually commence at the end of February, are this year a fortnight late. You have already had the Dinkas, who stand in great need of water for their flocks and herds, coming to you, and offering you ivory and slaves if you would prevail upon the rain to fall. The Al-Waj suffer quite as much as their neighbours. Superstitious, as, indeed, we all are in Africa, instead of recognizing that the rainy season will eventually commence in due course of nature, they will think that the sun does not desire the victim offered up to him, and that in order to protect and save him that luminary will withdraw his rays. Not only in that case will they hasten to cut the prisoner's bonds, but they will raise him to the dignity of a

sorcerer, and, attributing to him the power of making the sun stand still and of causing the rain to fall at his will and pleasure, they will pay him the greatest respect."

The Arab was right. The rainy season was fairly setting in, and very soon a tremendous storm burst forth. Then, as he had said, the natives rushed towards their prisoner, cut his bonds, and prostrated themselves before him.

Did the slave, thus miraculously saved, really believe that he was protected by the sun? Did he seriously regard himself as a sorcerer? We did not seek to enquire, but we saw him, as soon as he was released, look proudly round him, and, followed by his former persecutors, now become his admirers, wend his way towards the village, where he would be looked upon as a demi-god, be worshipped by all, and be held capable of causing rain or sunshine as he pleased.

Perhaps, too, he counted upon being able to resume his particular trade as a poisoner, but there would no longer be any one to say him nay—in his capacity as sorcerer and demi-god, his poisoning would be carried out under official sanction.

10th March.—We are progressing very rapidly, for, thanks to extra rations and a few presents, we are getting double stages out of our escort. We now rest from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., continuing on the road from the latter

hour until nine or ten o'clock at night in the clear, bright moonlight. We start, as usual, for our first stage at 5 a.m., and have now reached a kind of neutral ground, about three hundred square miles in extent, in which are situated, some five or six leagues from each other, the celebrated seribas, or depôts, of the Khartoum merchants. Owing to the letters of introduction presented to us at that town, we have been received most hospitably at all these depôts, thatched and roomy huts being placed at our disposal, as well as provisions for both ourselves and the caravan generally.

The denizens of these seribas are very far from being morally irreproachable; in fact, they fully deserve the bad character given to them by European travellers. But it must, in justice, be confessed that they perfectly understand the duties of hospitality, and that, in this regard, they do not in any way fall behind the Creoles of South America or of our French colonies.

CHAPTER XVII.

Notwithstanding the efforts of our hospitable entertainers to induce us to remain at the seriba, the last days of March found us still continuing on our way southwards, impelled onwards, because, amongst other reasons, the attractions of the seribas were causing frequent desertions from our ranks. Five of the soldiers and twenty bearers had already left us, and the absentees would have been more numerous still, had it not been for the exertions and eloquence of our two interpreters, Omar and Ali, whose influence over our followers is very great.

But if there is a falling off in the number of our men, there is no corresponding lack in the quantity of our provisions, for not only do we possess a quantity of sheep and oxen, but our bearers are also laden with all the eatables we could lay our hands on.

Two days' marching sufficed to take us across a portion of the territory belonging to the Djour tribe, whose name signifies "man of the woods," or "wild man." This tribe consists of about twenty thousand souls, devoted entirely to agriculture, and greatly resembling,

in language, personal appearance, and habits, our old friends the Shillooks.

We passed, the scriba of Geer and the village of Koolongo without halting at either, and we soon afterwards entered the district inhabited by the Bongos or Dours (Dohrs, according to the German authorities), who must not be confounded with the Djours already mentioned.

The Bongos occupy a territory lying between lat. 6° and 8° N., almost deserted, but equal in extent to those of our Departments, and joining, on the south, the outer portion of the extensive country of the Niam-Niam. It is evident, therefore, that the caravan is adhering closely to the route traversed by M. de Guéran.

The Khartoum merchants, assisted by the Nubians and Dinkas, invaded this territory about five and twenty years ago, and reduced its inhabitants to subjection, but the Bongos, notwithstanding their condition of vassalage, have managed to preserve their primitive manners and customs almost intact. As soon as ever we set foot in this district we perceived very easily that we had entered upon a region perfectly novel, and were amongst a series of tribes extending southwards and possessing essentially original characteristics. Amongst the Bongos we found individuals as black as ebony, but the prevailing tint, the ground of

their complexions, is red-brown, approaching to copper-colour. De Morin yesterday attempted a portrait of a Bongo, and he found it necessary to use the colour known under the name of Pompeian red.

The men, who are of medium height and very muscular, have short and curly hair, differing from the other tribes whose acquaintance we have made in this respect, as well as in the matter of clothing. Amongst the Bongos the men wear an apron of leather, or a strip of stuff fastened to the girdle, but the women are, as a rule, completely nude, a few only of them, after the fashion of our first parents, depending on leaves for their toilet. Ugly enough naturally, they add to their hideous appearance by extending the lower lip, by the insertion of cylindrical plugs of wood, until it projects two or three inches beyond the upper one. And, not content even with this, they allow themselves to grow so fat that they become positively deformed. With them all the curves and lines of the body disappear beneath a shapeless mass of fat. They have neither waist nor hips, and a perpendicular line can be drawn from their shoulders to their feet. By the side of these phenomena Joseph, the unwieldly, appeared thin, and, as for Miss Beatrice Poles, when she drew near a female Bongo, it was like a lucifer match approaching an elephant.

The match, it must be confessed, had the

best of it, for leanness, ungraceful though it be, is less repulsive than excessive obesity. Our beloved Englishwoman, consequently, was withering in her contempt for the Bongo ladies, regarding them as the very lowest in the scale of female humanity, and venting all her most biting sarcasm on their rotundity.

"That is just how you would like to see me, is it not?" she says occasionally, and with asperity, to Doctor Delange, whose admiration for the Bayaderes and dancing girls of the Soudan she has never forgiven.

"By no means, Miss Poles," Delange replies, with his habitual coolness. "I should be very sorry to see you like these women, but you must admit that at all events there is some connection between a perfectly developed woman and monsters such as these."

"I see no connection at all," exclaimed Miss Poles. "All your perfectly-developed women, as you call them, become masses of obesity sooner or later, and, if I were a man, should not admire them one bit."

Without attaching as much importance to the *embonpoint* of the Bongo women, we could not help being somewhat curious to know whether it arose from natural causes or whether it was a matter of caprice. Nassar, who lived for a long time amongst them with Schweinfurth, declares that his master could never gain any information on the subject, but he says that if

we really wish it, he will do his best to obtain for us an opportunity of settling the question. Delange and de Morin jumped at the offer, and we have commissioned Nassar to escort us to a species of harem, the proprietor of which, a Bongo chief, has expressed his willingness to receive us. Miss Poles wants to come also, and we do not see our way to saying no, especially as her presence in a harem is much more according to the proprieties than ours. We only exact from her a solemn promise that she will put a curb on her indignation as soon as she finds herself face to face with the phenomena we are about to see.

CHAPTER XVIII.

The extensive Bongo village, in which we were halting and where Nassar proposed to us a closer study of the manners and customs of the female inhabitants of the country, is situated close to Daggondoûd, an important seriba.

On our way we asked our guide about the individual to whose dwelling we were going. According to Nassar, he was formerly a powerful chief, but his village had been burnt, and his fields devastated by the Dinkas and Nubians. Three-fourths of his subjects had fled, and he was now living a quiet, retired life, so as not to attract the attention of his neighbours, and, to a certain extent, his masters, in the seriba. Nassar had informed him of our desire to see something of the interior economy of his household, and he had acquiesced in the hope of getting some presents from us.

These, and other details concerning the Bongo tribe generally, occupied our attention until we arrived at the habitation of the chief, who received us in the outer room of the house, a sort of unfurnished vestibule or antechamber, the walls of which were completely covered

with trophies and warlike weapons. Here were hung lance-heads of exquisite native workmanship, and there was seen the dangabor, a series of accumulated rings, most artistically made, and forming an armlet as flexible as can well be conceived. In another place arrows were interspersed amongst elephants' tusks, on which varied designs were traced, for the Bongo, besides being skilled in the manipulation of iron, shows also a great aptitude for sculpture. The ceiling was ornamented with bows, the skins of beasts, and drums hollowed out of the trunks of the tamarind tree.

Our host compelled us to admire everything; he did not omit a single detail, but unfolded all his treasures with an air of complacency, as much as to say—"There! you have never seen anything like that, either amongst my neighbours, or in your own country." In his eyes we were evidently merely a set of savages, and he looked upon himself as the sole representative, in his country, of art and industry.

At length he pulled aside the skins which served as curtains, and introduced us to his drawing-room, carpeted with reed-grass. All around this apartment were symmetrically arranged small wooden stools, each made out of a single block of wood, called *heybas*. Although the room was empty of occupants, it evidently belonged to the ladies of the establishment, for the males of the Bongo tribe despise seats, and

only allow them to be made use of by women and children. Above these stools, and hanging from the walls by carved pegs of wood, were round boxes containing flour, calabashes filled with beer made from sorghum, and called *leghuy*, and large bamboo baskets full of grain.

The sight of these viands quite startled Miss Poles.

"Good Heavens!" she exclaimed in a tone of voice in which amusement and alarm were very comically blended, "is our host going to ask us to dinner?"

Our companion's alarm was, to a certain extent, natural, seeing that the Bongos, who live on the confines of a district where we were destined soon to see cannibalism in full swing, are themselves by no means delicate in their eating. No description of animal food, whatever may be its state of decomposition, comes amiss to them, vultures, even when the term carrion might more properly be applied to them, worms, maggots, and scorpions being amongst their standing dishes. Nothing sickens them, nothing is revolting to their sense either of taste or smell.

Miss Poles was soon reassured, as there was no intention on the part of the chief to invite us to partake of his hospitality. He was merely, in compliance with our expressed wish, about to present to us his three lawful wives, but, in their position as the spouses of a once powerful

personage, it was essential that they should appear surrounded with a certain amount of *prestige*. Our host clapped his hands, and his private orchestra, for the Bongo is music mad, made its triumphal entry.

This orchestra consisted of four young slave girls, furnished with rude instruments. One had in her hand a species of guitar; the second, an empty calabash covered with a very flexible skin, which she beat with a bamboo stick, and the other two confined their exertions to violently shaking large gourds filled with pebbles. With these instruments an accompaniment was played to a melancholy chant, and musical talent is developed to such an extent amongst these people that their concert, though wild and strange, did not strike us as being at all grotesque. After a limited enjoyment of this triumphal march, the chief gave another signal, and his wives, lifting up the curtains, ponderously entered the room in single file.

We might very well have supposed ourselves to have lighted on a mountebank's show, or the booth of an exhibitor of monstrosities. We almost thought we heard the customary oration —"Walk up, ladies and gentlemen, and take your places, and pay as you go out if you are satisfied with what you have seen. Here you behold a female savage from the heart of Africa,

who has just made a tour of Europe. She has been exhibited before all the crowned heads on the Continent, and they have presented her with numerous and flattering tokens of their admiration. This woman, as heavy as she is savage, weighs, before eating——&c., &c."

I stop—the phenomena are before us, and we are permitted to admire them at our leisure. The three women sit on the stools ranged along the wall. When I say "sit," I am exaggerating—such of their person as can be accommodated on the seats certainly rests thereon, but much more overhangs the sides, and even if their too unwieldly forms had not prevented their sitting according to the ordinary acceptation of the term, a certain appendage, with which they had decked themselves in our honour, would have prevented them. They had endued themselves with a species of switch tail, made of bass, which they wear only on grand occasions for the purpose of indicating their rank and position in the world, and, above all, in order to produce a still greater effect on those who are privileged to behold them.

As for the remainder of their costume, with the exception of a few feathers in their hair, another highly fashionable adornment, they were like any other Bongo female. From their flesh, pierced and perforated in all directions, hung an infinity of ornaments, necklets without

number graced their podgy necks, and their noses and monstrous lips were adorned with their choicest copper rings.

The lord and master of these atrocious creatures took our astonishment for admiration. He positively swelled with importance, and, too pleased and proud to remain silent, he informed us, through the medium of Nassar, that we were the only people who had ever been favoured with a sight of his wives.

But the principal object of our visit was to gain information as to how these creatures were fattened up to their present prodigious size, and on this point we requested some explanation from the chief. Instead of replying verbally to the question put to him in our name by Nassar, the Bongo magnate, anxious to instruct us by example rather than precept, clapped his hands a third time.

CHAPTER XIX.

A FEW moments elapsed, and then five fresh slaves made their appearance, three of whom carried an immense jar filled with milk, and the other two iron bowls containing a paste made of sorghum and eleusine flour, called by the Arabs *téléboun*, and *tocusso* by the Abyssinians.

"We are expected to eat, after all," exclaimed Miss Poles. "You see I was quite right,"

"My dear Miss Poles," remarked Delange, "nobody wants to force you to eat, although, by the way, there is nothing at all repulsive about this food."

"Perhaps not, but I will never sit down at the same table with these creatures!"

"Did I understand you to say table? May I ask where you see one?"

"I was speaking metaphorically, M. Delange," replied Miss Poles, rather sarcastically, "a mode of conversation which, I regret to see, your education does not permit of your understanding."

This passage of arms over, we saw that the fears of our fair companion were groundless, and that the repast was really intended for the

Bongo ladies, and, in addition, as a kind of illustrated lecture for our benefit.

The chief took a small calabash, filled it with paste, and then carried it to the lips of one of his wives. I say lips from the force of habit, and the generally received impression that the lips themselves open to receive food and drink. But in these regions that notion is altogether wrong, because, seeing that the mouth assumes, by the process already mentioned, the shape of a long beak, the Bongos are obliged to make use of their fingers to lift the upper lip, and let their nourishment slip down the throat. When, after being thus opened, the mouth, which sticks out like a fortification armed with plates of ivory and copper, is allowed to shut, it does so with a sharp, metallic, and very extraordinary click.

After having made the three monstrosities swallow at least a pound of paste each, the chief dipped his calabash in the jar and gorged them with milk, they all this time looking exactly like huge babies being fed with the bottle, or a trio of overgrown geese attached, as is the case in some countries, to a plank to be fattened.

They did not seem to object in the least to the treatment, and it would not have mattered much if they had, for their husband never left off until the whole of the paste and milk had disappeared. Then, turning towards us, and

pointing to his treasures, he addressed us, through the medium of Nassar, of course, in the following terms—

"This is the way I feed them; this is how they attain to that perfection of form which renders them the handsomest women in the country, and makes them worthy of belonging to a man of my rank."

"At what age do they begin their excellent *regimé?*" asked Delange.

"From their earliest infancy," replied the chief. "It is to the interest of all fathers in this country to feed their daughters thus, because the fatter they are the higher is the price paid for them. It is our business afterwards to keep them in condition, and improve them if possible. The daughters of every man of any consequence are compelled, every morning, to imbibe a jar of milk under their father's eye. If they hesitate or refuse, he beats them until they make up their minds to conform to this usage."

"And have all the men of your tribe," asked the Doctor, "wives as fat as yours, and do they all feed them as highly?"

"Oh, dear no!" replied the chief, drawing himself up. "We are agricultural people and have but little cattle, so that it is only men in my position who can afford cows. My neighbours use beer instead of milk, but they never arrive at such results as mine."

"Does he, I wonder," asked de Morin, "look upon us as judges of the show, and expect a medal?"

"I dare say he does," said Delange, "and as a still higher compliment to him I am going to ask permission to take a few measurements."

Much to the indignation of Miss Poles, Delange, in the interests of science, as he said, proceeded to carry out his intention, and, when he had finished, he stepped back with the exclamation—

"Superb!"

This was duly turned into Bongo idiom by Nassar, on which the chief, whose gratification was both evident and complete, replied—

"Are they not? You have never seen anything like them, have you?"

"Never!" said Delange, as if he were lost in admiration. "And what, may I ask, is the age of this charming woman?" pointing to the fattest of the three.

"Seventeen."

"And a very promising girl she is."

In the meantime the women had been scanning Miss Poles very narrowly, and that lady's attention being attracted to the notice which was being taken of her, she asked Nassar to find out what their ideas were.

"They are very much exercised by your style of dress," replied the guide, "and they want to know why you wear it."

"Why I dress in this style? Because it is customary amongst civilized people. Do they expect English ladies to imitate them, I should like to know?"

"These ladies," continued Nassar, "know quite well that white people are in the habit of covering their bodies with superfluous and useless clothing, but they are astonished that you do not wear a costume like your friends."

The bare idea of being mistaken for one of the other sex was too much for Miss Poles, who grew almost livid with rage, and, turning on her heel, exclaimed, indignantly—

"Not content with being mis-shapen, they are idiots to boot."

Her anger seemed to amuse the Bongo ladies immensely, but I am bound to say that their hilarity did not improve their personal appearance. Their three beaks moving convulsively, their under lips clicking against the upper ones, and the noise caused thereby, produced a most grotesque effect, and when we saw and heard them laughing, we fairly roared.

Miss Poles, however, did nothing of the sort, for the more we laughed the more angry she grew, and she would have ended by giving dire offence to both the chief and his wives, if Delange had not stepped in to the rescue by sending Nassar into the outer room for the presents which we had brought with us.

We lost no time in unfolding our Parisian

treasures, consisting of cheap photographs, marionettes, dolls and their houses, and toy farm-yards. These playthings, which were just the very things to take the fancy of any African negress, gave immense pleasure to the women whose rising anger we wished to allay. They forgot Miss Poles and her indignation at once, and having, after desperate efforts, succeeded in standing up, they waddled towards the toys with childish glee, holding out their hands for the presents like overgrown babies.

Miss Poles, who had been meditating some terrible revenge, now produced a pocket looking-glass and held it suddenly before one of the women, fancying, undoubtedly, that the wretched creature, brought face to face with her deformity, would recoil with horror. Nothing of the kind. The woman's eyes danced with delight, her lips burlesqued a smile, and, to crown all, the huge mass of flesh began to wriggle about, for all the world like a penguin in a fit.

"Do you mean to say that she thinks herself pretty?" exclaimed Miss Poles.

"Certainly," said Delange. "And I am quite willing to confess that I think she is so in her way, just as you, Miss Poles, are in yours."

Miss Beatrice shrugged her shoulders and was about to put her glass in her pocket again, when the Bongo woman seized hold of it with both hands, and declined to give it up.

"I will not give it to you," cried Miss Poles.

"You have done quite enough in the way of insult by mistaking me for a man, without stealing my looking-glass. Give it up directly, I say. Do you think that I would inflict on a glass, accustomed to my features, the torture of reflecting yours?"

But the woman, who, naturally, did not understand a single syllable of this address, continued to pull her hardest, and things were once more beginning to look serious, when Delange again came to the rescue.

"You cannot think of making use of anything that has been touched by that odious creature," said he to Miss Poles.

"That is true," was the disgusted reply. "She has profaned it, and I give it up."

And, so saying, she marched out of the place, with her chin in the air, and without deigning to say good-by to the chief or his wives. Our curiosity, too, was more than satisfied, and consequently we lost no time in rejoining our huffy companion.

CHAPTER XX.

April 6th.—We are going straight through the Bongo territory without troubling ourselves about the neighbouring tribes. If we were differently circumstanced, and had not an object in view which we must reach as soon as possible, we should have halted for a few weeks at Sabbi, instead of only having made, a couple of days ago, a short stay there, as in that case we might have seen something of the Mittoos, who, we are told, are quite as remarkable as the Bongos.

Every day, in spite of our unceasing watchfulness, we have to record fresh desertions, caused by the increasing fear of the tribes in the South. It is a fact, also, that the inhabitants of the various seribas through which we pass, take care to enlarge upon the subject, because none of them, neither the traders, their soldiers, nor their servants, believe that we are undertaking so long a journey for the sole purpose of getting on the track of one of our friends. "It is all an excuse," they say. "The Franks are going southwards, as their fellow-countrymen, the brothers Poncet, formerly did,

to collect ivory and come into competition with us."

These people dare not attack us openly, because our force is a respectable one, and they know that we are, as it were, under the protection of the principal inhabitants of Khartoum, with whom they are inseparably connected commercially, but they do their best to injure us indirectly by diminishing our escort and inducing our bearers to leave us. As far as our bodily wants are concerned, we are treated well, thanks to our letters of credit, and, above all, to our rifles; morally, we are no longer welcomed at these last commercial depôts, as we were in the earlier ones. But the country is safe, provisions are abundant, and we have still bearers enough to carry them. If the effective strength of the caravan proper has now been decreased by about thirty individuals, we do not suffer from the loss, because from one stage to another we find Bongos both ready and willing to fill up the vacant places. Unfortunately, they are only attached to us provisionally, and they cannot, by any amount of persuasion, be induced to pass beyond their own frontier.

The rainy season has now fairly set in, but, nevertheless, we have frequent intervals of fine weather and a tolerably equable temperature. The thermometer, which stands during the day at from thirty-five to forty degrees in the shade, goes down at night to between sixteen and

eighteen, but that is a variation to which we are accustomed.

We suffer principally from the heavy showers which overtake us on the march, when it is impossible to change our clothes. The negroes, owing to their semi-nudity, take these shower-baths very stoically and often enjoy them, but our costume precludes us from sharing in these sentiments.

Madame de Guéran has lately been suffering from a succession of attacks of fever, and at first bore them courageously without a murmur or calling in our doctor, but Miss Poles, ever at her side, attentive to her slightest need, and truly good in spite of her little weaknesses, discovered how far from well our beloved Baroness was, and made her take quinine. Consequently, Madame de Guéran is already much better, and, after having been carried for two days in her palanquin, she is to-day once more on horseback.

April 9th.—This morning, after spending the night on the banks of a small river called the Tondy, a short distance from the village of Ngoly, just as we were emerging from our tents to get on the road again, Nassar appeared with the intelligence that both escort and porters refused to start. Their obstinacy this time appeared to him to be invincible, and he held it to be prudent to give the caravan a day's rest.

"So be it," said de Morin, after consulting with Madame de Guéran. "We had a hard day yesterday, the stages were long, the showers heavy, and the heat overpowering. We also think it better to rest here for a day, close to the river and in the shade, but we must not appear to give in to these people. We must make them believe that we, too, want a little peace and quietness. I'll manage it."

And, lighting a cigarette, he went quietly towards the encampment, and, accosting the first Nubian he met, he said in Arabic, which we were all beginning to speak with tolerable ease—

"Tell your comrades not to strike the tents, because we intend to remain here to-day. There is to be a *fête* to-night in a neighbouring village, and we want to see it. So much the worse for you all if you want to move on. There will be no marching to-day, and you can tell them all that I say so."

The news spread at once throughout the kraal that the Europeans intended to be present at the *fête*, or orgie, which was in preparation in the village of Ngoly. In reality this *fête* was the very reason why the negroes refused to move on, but they never expected that their white chief would partake in their wish. If they gave full value to his generosity and sense of justice, they also dreaded his anger, and it

was not without a certain amount of alarm that they had entered into a conspiracy to remain where they were. Their fears now disappeared, and they gave themselves up gleefully to the sweets of idleness for the day, and the prospect of every sort of excess in the evening.

CHAPTER XXI.

The moon was at the full, and the sky appeared as bright as at mid-day, on the evening when we were called upon to share in the games and mirth of the Africans. The two ladies remained in camp, there being too much license in equatorial revelry to admit of their presence.

The whole village at eight o'clock was summoned to the *fête* by beat of drum, and the largest huts were at once transformed into cafés, where all the Bongos, with the chief at their head, set to work to drink themselves into a fitting state for the coming festivities. The intoxicating beverages were contained in large earthenware jars, ranged along the walls, and from these the liquid was ladled out wholesale, by means of small gourds and calabashes.

But presently the drinking gave place to a general outcry for the dancing to begin. The huts were deserted and the streets of the village crowded in proportion, and all the men, followed by the women and children, hurried at full speed, yelling and leaping, towards a neighbouring plain surrounded by dense thickets.

The *fête*, properly so called, now commenced

by a circle being formed round some toothless, wizened old sorcerers, who droned out a lengthy recitative in measured, almost melancholy rhythm. The bystanders, whose ears caught the strain at once, joined in the chant, and the whole of the voices formed one vast, reverberating chorus, in the midst of which, at intervals, could be heard the howling of a dog, the cackling of hens, the crowing of cocks, the roaring of a lion, or the shrill trumpeting of an elephant, serving as so many incentives to the concourse to give free scope to their talent for imitation.

As soon as the chant came to an end in a prolonged groan, there was a renewed outcry for the dancing, and an orchestra of instrumentalists proceeded to take up a position on the trunks of fallen trees, or any slight vantage ground that was at hand. One performer blew with all the force of his lungs into a gigantic wooden trumpet, decorated with carvings representing in nearly every case a human head; another hammered with his hands and feet at an enormous mass of wood, hollowed out of the thickest part of a tree and covered with bullock hide, whilst a third had in front of him the *oupaton*, or tom-tom, a piece of brass on which he banged at intervals with a kind of rude drum stick. The, to us, familiar Chinese bells, or handbells, were represented by large gourds

filled with pebbles, which were rattled, without intermission, by the women and children.

Then the mob, men, women, and children, gave themselves up to a frightful hurly-burly, a series of contortions, bounding, leaping, throwing their arms and legs in all directions, after a fashion at first sight positively bewildering, but in reality quite regular, and carried out in concert. It was simply a delirium, an indescribable frenzy.

Suddenly the orchestra ceased, every sound was hushed, and each one remained where he was. To confusion succeeded utter silence and complete repose.

Scarcely a moment elapsed before the drummers gave the signal again, and the dance recommenced more wildly than ever. This goes on sometimes for hours, even until morning and the feet of these maniacs refuse their office. But we did not stop for the end, and towards 3.0 a.m. we made the best of our way towards our camp, feeling rather anxious as to whether our caravan, which had taken part in the orgie, would be in a fit state to start later on. The departure was, as it turned out, a matter of some difficulty, for it was not until the afternoon that we could move, and then only by dint of mingled threats, promises, and a distribution of rewards and punishments combined.

April 11th. To-day we met a caravan coming from the south. The drums beat, standards were unfurled, and a regular *feu de joie* was fired in honour of the occasion. We contrived, nevertheless, to prevent our escort from fraternising with the new comers, and compelled them to content themselves with shaking hands and embracing. The leader of the caravan, a rather disreputable looking Turk, saluted us as he passed, a piece of politeness which we solemnly returned.

Notwithstanding our coolness towards the Turk and his people, the meeting was a relief from the monotony of the route. It was like being out at sea, on a long voyage, and coming across a vessel appearing in the horizon, growing larger and larger by degrees, passing, hoisting her flag, growing smaller again, and, finally, disappearing from view.

April 13th. After passing, yesterday, through a district where game, both large and small, was plentiful, we have, to-day, left the low country and have gone up hill to about five hundred feet above our former level. On our way Nassar came up to us, and, pointing to the summit of a mountain lying to the south-west, said—

"That is the Mbala-Nguia, which separates the Bongo territory from that of the Niam-Niam. To-morrow you will set foot on the soil of that new tribe, and you will very soon

be in a position to judge of the correctness of the information I have given you about the man of whom you are in search."

At last, then, we are on the point of entering the country visited by so few Europeans. At length we are in the midst of the famous race, supposititiously endowed with tails, about whom so many lies have been told, and amongst the man-eaters, who have been described to us as being so terrible.

CHAPTER XXII.

As the caravan had not yet surmounted all the hills which form a barrier, natural but very little respected, between the territory of the Bongos and that of the Niam-Niam, the camp had been pitched on the final declivity of the mountain, on the edge of a large plain, whence we obtained a magnificent view. Everybody retired early, and the bearers and soldiers, tired out with a long march up the steep side of the mountain, succumbed to the influence of the drowsy god sooner than usual.

Before the final descent into the country of the Niam-Niam was made, M. Périères put together the notes jotted down with reference to the Bongos, and made up the register of the expedition. M. de Morin, meanwhile, spread a bullock hide on the grass, close to his tent, and, lying flat on his back, with a cigarette in his mouth, gave himself up to a lazy contemplation of the star-lit sky. Miss Poles, with folded arms and head in the air, paced to and fro with lengthy strides, from the camp to the nearest trees and back again. The movement of her lips showed that she was talking to her-

self, and she was, no doubt, debating the question whether Dr. Delange was really worthy of her, or whether she would not do better to transfer her affections to M. de Morin or M. Périères.

Madame de Guéran, in whom the loveliness of the night possibly caused a longing for solitude, was seated in front of her tent, but she, nevertheless, appeared insensible to the surrounding splendour, and looked straight before her. Were her thoughts flying backwards, over the vast expanse of memory? or were they, perchance, leading her on in an attempt to fathom the future?

Dr. Delange walked up and down in front of her for a few moments, without her seeing him. He seemed anxious to accost her, but yet unwilling to break in upon her reverie. At last he summoned up courage and joined her. Seeing him, she raised her head impatiently, as if to drive away the thoughts that had been oppressing her, and said, in her sweet voice—

"You have something to say to me, I suppose, my dear Doctor? Pray say on."

"Yes," he replied. "For some days past I have been anxious for a little conversation with you, but I could never find you alone. To-night, on the contrary, everybody appears inspired with a desire to respect your solitude, and I venture to disturb it."

"And you have done well. But why choose

this late hour, and so isolated a position? Have you a secret to confide to me?"

"No," replied M. Delange, quietly, "but you have one, and I am come to ask you to confide in me. Do not be indignant with me," he continued, seeing that Madame de Guéran looked surprised. "Do not tell me that our friendship is of too recent a date to warrant me in any attempt to discover your secrets or seek your confidence. In so saying you would be guilty of an injustice, and would, moreover, cause me an amount of pain which I have not deserved. Our mode of life during the last six months has brought us into closer connection than many years of ordinary society would have done, and I know that you are good enough to give me a place in your friendship and esteem already. For you, Madame de Guéran, I have a sincere respect, I may say, a sacred regard. The term is not at all high-flown, for you recall to me, both in feature and disposition, a fondly-loved relative, whom I had the misfortune to lose two years ago. It was, I think, her death which caused my going astray to a certain extent, and led me to adopt a club life, up to that time a sealed book to me. There is no reason, therefore, why you should not honour me with your confidence, and I think you will not accuse me of being over-bold in asking you for it."

"That is true," she replied, holding out her

hand. "But what have I to tell you? What do you want to know?"

"Many things; and if you still hesitate to throw off your reserve towards the friend, look upon me merely as your doctor. We medical men are, as you know, confessors, to whom everything may be revealed, but by whom nothing is repeated."

"But, my dear Doctor, I am not ill."

"There lies your great mistake. You are ill, and that is my reason for interfering, first of all, as a doctor. Have you not been suffering from fever for some days past?"

"Oh, yes; but that is unavoidable in this climate."

"Excuse me; the climate, so far as concerns the districts through which we have lately passed, and the altitude in which we now are, is excellent. If a constitution such as yours could be influenced by climate, you would have been ill during the first portion of our journey —at Khartoum, which is very unhealthy, on the Upper Nile, or the Gazelle River. You were, on the contrary, in perfect health there, better than any of us, and you only began to suffer when we left off."

"From a spirit of contradiction, perhaps," said she, smiling. "But what is the result of your diagnosis?"

"This. Africa has no effect whatever upon your organization, and I must, therefore, look

to other causes to account for the fever from which you are suffering, the state of depression and prostration noticeable in you, and for certain nervous symptoms which you cannot conceal from me, notwithstanding all your efforts."

"And what are those causes, Mr. Inquisitor-General?"

"May I tell you?"

"I have made up my mind to hear all you have to say."

"Well, then, they are purely moral. Your mind is ill at ease, your imagination is ever at work, and your heart is distressed. Hence the physical disturbance and disorders which I have just mentioned to you."

Madame de Guéran changed colour and bent down her head without replying. She seemed to be uncomfortable and embarrassed by the close scrutiny to which she had been subjected, but, though at first she was pained by the dissection of her innermost feelings, she still felt less isolated, less thrown back upon herself.

This state of feeling was intelligible enough—instead of being called upon for a confession she would not have had the courage to make, it was made for her. Her silence was in itself an avowal, and in saying nothing she told all.

M. Delange hastened to follow up the advantages he had gained, and continued, with warmth—

"Confide in me. You know very well that for some time past you have been seeking a confidant, but you could not find one. It was impossible for you to know me as I really am—serious enough when occasion calls for it, and devoted heart and soul to those I care for. You could not open out your heart to Miss Poles, because her eccentricities prevent her claims being taken into serious consideration, and as for our two friends, they are the very last persons you would choose as confidants."

"Why so?" she asked, abruptly.

"You want to know?"

"Certainly; candour for candour."

"And if my candour displeases you?"

"So much the worse for me. I ask you for it."

"Very well. You can only confide in a friend, and both these gentlemen love you."

"Have they told you so?" asked the Baroness, quickly.

"Never, I assure you," replied M. Delange. "But you will admit," he added, with a smile, "that it was not a very difficult discovery to make."

"Yes, they do love me," she said, resolutely, "but you forget, Doctor, that we were dealing with my sufferings, and, I presume, you do not wish me to infer that they are due to these two gentlemen."

"To a certain extent they are."

"How so? Is it absolutely necessary that I, too, should respond to this two-fold love, and be *éprise* in my turn?"

"No; it is very clear to me that you have no love for either of them. But their suffering conduces to yours, and you cannot help a constant feeling of uneasiness as you say to yourself—'What is to be the end of all this? How am I to extricate myself from the difficulty? How am I to get out of the false situation in which I have put myself?'"

"And, according to you, this simple feeling of uneasiness has sufficed to render me susceptible of fever, to cause me to lose my colour, to throw me into a state of prostration, and to bring on a nervous attack? I thought I was stronger."

"And so you are, in reality. The sufferings of these gentlemen simply annoy you. Your illness is within yourself. Your nerves are over-excited by the continual struggle that is going on within you, and the state of hesitation and uncertainty in which you are living."

"What uncertainty?"

"You are not in love with either of our two friends, but you are not quite sure that it will not come to pass some day. They evidently please you, and their conversation is agreeable. When they do some good action, or render you some service, your heart beats somewhat more

quickly. And, what grieves you, unnerves you more than all, and puts you in a fever, is the fact that you do not know which of the two pleases you most. You are continually hesitating between one and the other, you are carried away by your imagination, and you lose yourself in useless questions and futile self-examination."

"It is because I do not love at all!" she exclaimed. "Do you think a woman does not know when she loves? Do you think she can be deceived in that?"

This time she spoke with determination.

The shades of night had now fallen completely, and the moon, which had taken possession of the sky and was reigning there in undisputed sway, lighted up the countenance of Madame de Guéran with a silvery radiance, and enhanced the natural delicacy of her features.

CHAPTER XXIII.

The Doctor replied very quietly, without seeming to notice the outburst—

"I agree with you, Baroness, and I have already explained myself on this score. You are not in love. If our friends were to leave you to-morrow, you would forget them. It is their presence alone that makes you uneasy, I had almost said, irritable."

"In that case," replied Madame de Guéran, "my illness is known, and you have found out its cause. M. de Morin and M. Périères inspire me with a vague, indefinable, almost inexplicable interest, and this divided interest," she continued, smilingly, "upsets me, worries me, and is killing me by inches."

"No, no, my dear patient, we have not quite reached that point yet. You are not the woman to allow yourself to be done to death for so little. You are no ignorant girl, to languish and grow thin in such a case as this. The interest—the word is your own—you take in our friends has no such tremendous effect upon you. It does not give rise even to a feeling of remorse when you think of M. de Guéran and

your hopes of recovering him. You had every reason to believe yourself to be a widow, and you were one from a legal or official point of view; you could, if you had so wished, have given your whole heart to either of your travelling companions, and one ought really to admire you for not having bestowed even a particle of that interest—shall I call it by that name?—on either of them, even though you were at perfect liberty to withdraw it if you thought fit. Therefore, I repeat, you have nothing wherewith to reproach yourself from this point of view."

"Is there another point, then?" said she, trying to smile, but unable entirely to hide the emotion caused by the last words addressed to her.

"Yes," said M. Delange, earnestly, "you are in love, seriously in love with him who could not accompany you, whose place I took. In other words, you are in love with Dr. Desrioux."

She trembled at the name, but she did not reply, neither did she attempt to impose silence on her indiscreet confidant.

He resumed, in a more sprightly tone—

"Do you think that one doctor can keep anything from another? I do not speak much, and I am, perhaps, looked upon as seeing less. People are apt to say—'Oh, M. Delange has only eyes for cards; you need not mind him.'

They are wrong. I can see beyond my game, and I make my little mental notes. I subject my neighbours to a moral auscultation, though I appear only to be marking the king. The day on which I had the honour of being introduced to you, and of becoming acquainted, in your drawing-room, with M. Desrioux, I saw at once that my *confrère* was sincerely attached to you. On the following day I discovered that he was not absolutely indifferent to you; but, to be perfectly open and leave nothing unexplained, I must also admit that on the day when you left France you had no idea of the strength of your affection for him. If it had come home to you, you would not have accepted MM. de Morin and Périères as your travelling companions. You knew that they were *éprise* with you, and it would have been repugnant to your delicacy of feeling to have allowed them to become more, and at the same time hopelessly so. It was only by degrees, later on, by reason of separation, absence, the exchange of letters, and the receipt of news, that you found out the strength of your attachment, as well as that, in all probability, it was ever on the increase."

Pensive, and with her nature stirred to its innermost depths by what she had heard, she continued to preserve absolute silence. She had, it is true, with reluctance, and almost fearfully, confessed all these things to herself,

but it was the first time she had been told of them by anybody else.

She listened to everything the Doctor had to say without interruption, without any appearance of a desire that he would be less explicit and more considerate, and the sad smile which hovered about her lips seemed to say—

"Be perfectly open. Your words hurt me, but I must listen to them. I must open my eyes resolutely to my position; and you appear to have realized it more completely than I have. Say on then, and if, after you have said all, you can apply your healing art to me, you will be doing me a real service, I assure you."

M. Delange, for his part, derived encouragement from the silence, and continued in the same calm, brotherly tone, but slightly moved, withal, against his will.

"This love," he resumed, "which you have unknowingly brought with you, is weakening you and wearing you out. You would fain tear it out of your heart, but you lack the power so to do. At times you are tempted to reproach MM. de Morin and Périères for not making you forget him who is away, and yet if you yield for a moment to the pleasure of their society—and it is pleasant—you are at once assailed by the fear that you are wanting in truth towards that other one. You return, as it were, to him in all humility and submission, and then comes a sudden apparition of your husband looming in

the distance, in the unknown land whither our steps are bent. You want to find him, duty beckons you on, and his memory is dear to you; but you shudder at the thought that your heart is no longer your own, and that it is impossible for you to give it to him. There, my dear Baroness, I have told you all that you could tell me; I am a queer confidant, for it is I alone who have been speaking all this time. I asked you to let me know your secrets; you have kept them to yourself, and I have narrated to you my own discoveries. Not that I regret in the least either my indiscretion or my garrulity, since they have taught you to know me and to see in me a devoted friend, a brother anxious for your welfare. You will no longer keep me at a distance; but, when you find your troubles too heavy for you to bear, you will summon me to your aid and open out your heart to me. And in that way alone can you alleviate your distress."

He was silent, and she, equally mute, got up and, in token of friendship, took the Doctor's arm. In this way they returned to the encampment and soon gained the nearest tents. When she reached her own, Madame de Guéran turned towards M. Delange, and held out her hand, as if to say—

"I forgive you for the boldness of your speech. You have shown yourself my friend, and I am glad to know that it is so."

She disappeared within her tent, and he betook himself to his.

M. Périères and M. de Morin were not so completely absorbed, the one in his notes of the expedition, and the other in his cigarette and the contemplation of nature, as to be entirely unconscious of the proceedings of Madam de Guéran and the Doctor. By-and-by they met, and made their comments on the lengthy *tête-à-tête*.

"What can he be saying to her?" asked M. Périères.

"I have not the remotest idea, but their conversation appears to be interesting."

"Yes, in this bright moonlight we can clearly distinguish Madame de Guéran's countenance, and she seems moved. Do you think that the Doctor is discussing our position with regard to her?"

"I am pretty sure of it," replied M. de Morin. "He is far too intelligent and observant not to have perceived the depth of our attachment. Why do you ask?"

"Because Delange is just the man to fall in love on his own account, if he did not see that we were in that plight."

"And, seeing it, you think that he would hold his hand?"

"Certainly, I do. He is too devoted to us, and he is too straightforward in his ideas to cross our path. Are you jealous, my dear fellow?"

"Of the Doctor? Oh, no. I have too much respect for Madame de Guéran; and, besides, I think she is too uncomfortable about her position with regard to us to wish to render it still more complicated."

"De Morin?"

"Périères?"

"Shall we be perfectly open with each other?"

"We have always been so."

"Except at Khartoum, where we were within an ace of falling out."

"True, but we profited by that escape to swear eternal friendship, and I have never gone back from my word."

"Nor I either. You are sure of that?"

"Perfectly. Moreover, we have adopted certain precautions against any temptation to tear each other to pieces which might assail us. Our agreement was both wise and just. If Madame de Guéran, whether by word or look, gives either of us to understand that he is the chosen one, the happy man is at once to inform his ill-fated companion of the fact, and the victim is at once to withdraw from the contest, abandon all hope, and quit the field."

"Yes, that was it. And I can only regret, my dear fellow, that I am not in a position to ask you to take yourself off."

"My dear Périères, I positively ache to tell

you to make yourself scarce, and yet I have not the slightest authority for so doing."

"So much the better, because, as far as I am concerned, I should be in a regular fix if I had to make a solitary journey back through the land of those awful Bongos, those amiable Dinkas, not to mention the Shillooks and so many others. I am rather inclined to think that, for my sake, at all events, Madame de Guéran would do well not to decide in your favour."

"To tell you the truth, my dear fellow, I am afraid she will decide neither for one nor the other."

"Precisely my fear; she shrinks from inflicting too severe a wound on the rejected one. We are not behaving generously towards her; we take away from her all freedom of choice, and, very possibly, we prevent her from saying what she would like to say."

"Nevertheless, my very dear friend, I cannot propose that, instead of descending this hill tomorrow with all our companions, for the purpose of visiting the Niam-Niam, you should retrace your steps, cheered by the society of my faithful Joseph and the donkey, of which, in that case, you would be anxious to deprive the caravan."

"I am perfectly sure of it, my dear de Morin, and yet, if we had lived in another age than our own, we should have found some means of coming to an understanding."

"Yes, the King's Musketeers, for instance, in our position, would not have hesitated to draw their swords. I have often thought about it myself. That age was a good one, and the sword settles matters so completely."

"We might revive the custom very easily. In the heart of Africa one cannot be said to belong to any age. I am sure that when we paid our visit to those Bongo women we had no very clear idea of what century we were in. At all events on that occasion nobody could have objected to our going a step backwards, to the seventeenth or eighteenth century in imagination."

"My notion, I perceive, makes you smile, and, after all, we had better let it drop. If I happened to kill you, or to be killed by you, Madame de Guéran, I am sure, would detest me, or hate you, as the case might be. She is not very fond of the eighteenth century; she belongs to the present day, and she is journeying on through Africa, pursuing one sole idea without paying much attention to Bongo customs."

"Very possibly so. Thus, my poor friend, we can only wait."

"As you say, we can only wait, and, in truth, it is the only course open to us just at present."

"There I differ from you—we can go to bed.

It is two o'clock in the morning already, and we have to start at five."

"You are right. You do not mind my having thought of the King's Musketeers?"

"Mind it? The idea was capital, only, like many other excellent ideas, it was not practicable."

"I'll try to hit upon something else."

"And so will I. Good night."

"Good-bye—for three hours."

On the following day, before noon, the caravan, preceded by its band, set foot on the territory of the Niam-Niam.

CHAPTER XXIV.

Whilst, in the centre of equatorial Africa, about five hundred leagues from all the waters which lave the shores of the African continent and communicate with Europe, the French expedition was making ready to penetrate still farther into the interior of the country, and to pass limits hitherto considered to be impassable, the Parisians continued their usual manner of life, and, without caring one jot for the intrepid travellers, applied themselves to their business on a small, and their pleasures on a large scale.

The various Geographical Societies had, however, in their journals published a few notes despatched from Khartoum, in January, 1873, but, as these journals do not come under the head of ordinary current literature, they receive little or no notice at the hands of society. In the drawing-room of the Marquise de Genevray, the aunt of M. de Morin, after discussing the last new play, the latest *cause célèbre*, and the coming fashions, a word or two might be said about Egypt and the Red Sea, but there everybody stopped, for fear of falling into some gross geographical blunder. One day, when Madame

de Genevray, to give a fillip to conversation, mentioned having received news of her nephew from Souakim, everybody stared in astonishment, but nobody dared say a word except a lady of a certain age, who, nodding her head as if she knew all about it, hazarded the observation that it was some distance from Paris, on which there was a general chorus of—"Oh, yes, a considerable distance!"

Some time afterwards her guests, on hearing the Marquise come out with such names as Gondokoro and Bahr-el-Ghazal, looked positively alarmed, and wondered what these outlandish, harsh-sounding names meant, and where those countries were situated, of whose existence nobody had ever dreamt. Consequently, Madame de Genevray made up her mind to be more reticent in future, at all events where geography was concerned.

In the club to which M. de Morin, Périères, and Delange belonged, several books on African travel, published by Hachette, lay on the library table for about three weeks, but these volumes, purchased simply as mementos of boon companions, were as a rule uncut, and were soon lost to view beneath the latest novels, the fortnightly reviews, and the evening papers. If, in October and November, a few members of the club in the afternoon or before betaking themselves to bouillotte or baccarat, mentioned the Parisian expedition, asking for news of it

and appearing interested in its fate, in December and January it was forgotten. The last plays of Angier and Sardou, the exploits of Mdlle. X., the duel fought by Z., and the coming to grief of young D, with a slight sprinkling of politics, at that time were the sole topics of conversation.

Dr. Desrioux and the Count de Pommerelle alone had continued to follow, in thought and on the map, their African friends. But no news having been received from them since their departure from Khartoum, MM. de Pommerelle and Desrioux were perforce limited to the written programme of the expedition and the route therein laid down. It was merely on vague lines, by probabilities rather than assured facts, that they could accompany the travellers on the map, and with them travel towards the regions barely marked. To the friendly letters, in which the individuality of each of their former companions so clearly asserted itself, succeeded records of travel which any one might read. They studied Africa in books, instead of living in it, as they had up to this time done, in the society of those they held so dear.

The time, indeed, had come when the caravan having said adieu to the Monbuttoo country, they could not find any publication nor gain any information which could give them an

idea even of the districts traversed. A large blank space, extending over hundreds of miles, was before them, and their imagination alone had to take the place of the reliable reports hitherto within their reach. So, calling to mind the regrets expressed by M. Périères, in his last letter from Khartoum, with regard to the route chosen, and remembering the possibly more direct route he had traced in a south-westerly direction, the two carpet travellers proposed to make a fresh start from Zanzibar, and go westwards, towards the great lakes to meet their friends. They had already got their pins ready, and were using their glasses to discover the points at which the expedition, according to their suppositions, was bound to halt.

These ideas and cares had not, however, entirely occupied MM. Desrioux and de Pommerelle. The former divided his time between his patients and his mother, whose health was daily becoming more precarious, and caused him serious anxiety. The latter lived on in his usual style, idle, *ennuyé*, and tired of Paris, where he remained only from the force of habit. Even this became too weak to hold him, and at last he made up his mind to go away, but, before doing so, he had to say good-bye to Dr. Desrioux, whom for a week or so he had rather neglected. He found him at home, in deep mourning, and looking pale, worn, and sad.

"What is the matter with you?" exclaimed M. de Pommerelle, "what has happened to you, my dear fellow?"

"I have just lost my mother," said M. Desrioux, in a broken voice.

"And you never sent for me? Why did you not let me know of her illness?"

"I had no time, and, indeed, I thought of nothing but striving to save her. I studied her complaint, consulted my *confréres*, tried everything, and, I fear, only tortured the poor woman in the hopes of restoring her. It would have been better to have left her alone, to have let her pass away in peace and quiet. Everybody told me so, but I could not believe them, and I went on, hoping against hope. I had wrought so many unexpected cures amongst strangers, but when it came to my mother's turn I could do nothing. And, now, she is dead—she whom I so fondly loved, whom I never left, and for whom I sacrificed everything. And I—I am alone."

"No," remonstrated the Count, "you have still faithful friends, and I am one of them. Come, rouse yourself and get away from this house. Come with me."

"I cannot, I must watch still beside her. To-morrow she will be buried, and I shall never see her more. Now I can see her and be with her. To-morrow, after—you know what I

mean — to-morrow take me away, far away, I can never come back here. I could not bear it."

"I am yours," said the Count, "and I will go wherever you wish."

CHAPTER XXV.

The journal of the expedition, under the command of Madame de Guéran, is very concise as regards the Niam-Niam, whose territory the Europeans were about to enter when we left them.

An irresistible impulse hurried the caravan forward. They scarcely rested, but marched, marched, marched. All trace of whatever apathy may have existed had disappeared; they were drawing near the Equator, and yet, owing to the fact that the country is, on an average, over two thousand yards above the sea level, and owing still more to the numerous water courses to be met with at every step, the heat was less and the air lighter, and the travellers felt stronger and more active.

The escort, also, was in a better state of discipline. In the midst of the famous tribes whom they knew by hearsay only, they were afraid of accidents and misadventures, and they dared not leave the beaten track. Every one kept his place in the ranks, and the idlers and incorrigibles now hesitated either to lag behind or to make any expeditions on their own account into

the brakes and thickets. Moreover, the caravan was not as numerous as it was when it started. We have already seen that it had diminished gradually, losing many of its members in the various seribas and amongst the Bongos. But, at the last stage before entering the Niam-Niam territory, there was a panic, a regular stampede, and more than sixty men bolted in all directions. Those who remained were at all events better worth having, because, having resisted every temptation, they might be looked upon as likely to be reliable in the future. They appeared to have unlimited confidence in their leaders, and they fully understood that, to make head against all dangers, they needed the support and assistance of the Europeans, and the influence which white men ever possess over their black brethren. Every step forward made desertion and flight more difficult. How, indeed, could they find their way back without a guide or counsellor in the midst of this tangled mass of woods, forests, and trees? They were very like our own sailors. Noisy and occasionally unmanageable when in harbour or ashore, they blindly obey their officers when at sea. They are conscious of their want of experience, and they know that, in spite of their numbers, they would be powerless to navigate the ship or fight against the elements. Brute force gives way before moral influence.

We may assume that the Europeans, accord-

ing to all probability, though they are not explicit on this point, profited by the lower temperature and the improved discipline of the caravan to make longer stages and cross the territory of the Niam-Niam as quickly as possible. In the evening, tired out, they had not the heart to jot down in their journal their notes by the way. They confined themselves to a remark here and there, and a few curt paragraphs to which we may add the information we ourselves have gathered from the most reliable works on the subject. Thus, we are enabled to devote a few lines, very few, to a most curious and almost unknown race, whose savage nature in some respects passes all limits, but who also can boast of a species of civilization which one cannot help admiring.

Their cannibalism is admitted by every traveller except the Italian, Praggia, but even he confesses to have been a witness to one instance of it, though he puts it down to hatred and a spirit of revenge. We may, consequently, look upon it as a fact, and consider the Niam-Niam from other points of view, which certainly redound more to their credit.

Their vast territory is drained, to a certain extent, by countless streams, living sources of marvellous richness. In their land the glory of the tropics shines forth in all its splendour. "Trees with immense stems," says Schweinfurth, "and of a height surpassing all that we

had elsewhere seen (not even excepting the palms of Egypt), here stood in masses which seemed unbounded except where at intervals some less towering forms rose gradually higher and higher beneath their shade. In the innermost recesses of these woods one would come upon an avenue like the colonnade of an Egyptian temple, veiled in the leafy shade of a triple roof above. Seen from without, they had all the appearance of impenetrable forests, but traversed within, they opened into aisles and corridors which were musical with many a murmuring fount. Hardly anywhere was the height of these woods less than seventy feet, and on an average it was much nearer a hundred. Far as the eye could reach it rested solely upon green, which did not admit a gap. The narrow paths that wound themselves partly through and partly around the growing thickets were formed by steps consisting of bare and protruding roots, which retained the light loose soil together. Mouldering stems, thickly clad with moss, obstructed the passage at well-nigh every turn. The air was no longer that of the sunny steppe, nor that of the shady grove ; it was stifling as the atmosphere of a palm-house. Its temperature might vary from 70° to 80° Fahr., but it was so overloaded with an oppressive moisture exhaled by the rank foliage that the traveller could not feel otherwise than relieved to escape."

Piaggia calls this part of the Niam-Niam

territory "galleries," and he says that they reminded him of shady, perfume-laden paths in the enchanted gardens of the poets. But, instead of lovely nymphs, they are peopled with the ponderous rhinoceros, the savage buffalo, the massive elephant, and numerous varieties of monkeys.

The population of the known districts, for we have not yet reached the extreme western frontier, amounts to about three millions, spread over two degrees of longitude and six of latitude.

The appearance of this tribe, called amongst themselves Zandey or Sandey, for the word Niam-Niam is a nick-name, signifying "eaters," is startling to a degree, and puts in the shade everything seen from the Upper Nile to Khartoum, or in all the region situated to the south of the Gazelle River, making it appear tame and spiritless.

CHAPTER XXVI.

M. Périères relates, in his journal, that the caravan had scarcely set foot on the territory of the Niam-Niam than it was surrounded by an inquisitive crowd, which increased every moment. It was a question of who should be the first to see the white man, and, above all, the white woman, the Sultana, at the sight of whom there were universal cries of admiration. The news of the arrival of the *cortége* spread from hamlet to hamlet, and there was a regular human hedge along the road. The Europeans were not, however, the objects of any hostile demonstration. Some of the chiefs, it is true, demanded a tribute, but as soon as they had received it, they fraternized with the escort, offered their services as guides to the next district, and were often of great use. M. Périères took advantage of this curiosity, which brought him in close contact with the natives, to trace their portraits in a few lines, whilst M. de Morin, on horseback, made a sketch here and there of a picturesque costume, or an original type of countenance.

The portrait of the Zandeys, or Niam-Niam, taken from pen and pencil, and, more important still, after nature, is briefly this—average height, that of Europeans, upper part of the body long, legs short, a disposition towards fat; colour of the skin earthy red, hair thick and frizzy, but of extraordinary length and falling down the back in plaits and tufts, head round and broad. The almond-shaped eyes have clearly defined eyebrows; the lips are not deformed by any so-called ornaments, and the Zandeys, who take very good care not to imitate the Dinkas, do not deprive themselves of any teeth, but they file their incisors to a point, after the fashion of their brother cannibals and their western relatives, the Pahaouins.

Their costume is composed of skins, fastened round the waist and reaching to the knees, or in some cases of a girdle of hippopotamus hide, to which hangs a small gourd filled with the fat used to anoint the body. On their shoulders they also carry a sort of pouch filled with provisions, for, acting up to his reputation as a large eater, the Niam-Niam never stirs away from his home without a stock of eatables. That portion of the body which is uncovered is ornamented by a variety of tattooed patterns, and sometimes, in addition, by necklets of wood or iron, or formed from the teeth of animals. The head is bare, except in the case of the

chiefs, who, in spite of the heat, wear a species of fur hood.

As for the dress of the women, M. Périères describes that in four words—they have not any. The Zandey females, adds the historian of the expedition, would show far better taste if they did dress themselves a little more, for, with the exception of a few of the young ones, who are tolerably well-made and good looking, none of the women are attractive, although they are never deformed, nor have they any of the repulsive characteristics common to their Bongo neighbours. Their ugliness does not, however, prevent their being loved, since in no other part of Africa can such good husbands be found as the Niam-Niam, who, notwithstanding that polygamy is in vogue amongst them, as amongst all the contiguous tribes, have a real affection for their wives. It must also be recorded that the women are remarkable for their modesty, and on this point we may be allowed to call Schweinfurth to witness. "The social position of the Niam-Niam women," says the German traveller, "differs materially from what is found amongst other heathen negroes in Africa. The Bongo and Mittoo women are on the same familiar terms with the foreigner as the men, and the Monbuttoo ladies are as forward, inquisitive, and prying as can be imagined; but the women of the Niam-Niam treat every stranger with great reserve.

Whenever I met any women coming along a narrow pathway in the woods or on the steppes, I noticed that they always made a wide circuit to avoid me, and returned into the path farther on; and many a time I saw them waiting at a distance, with averted faces, until I had passed by. This reserve may have originated from one of two opposite reasons. It may, on the one hand, have sprung from the more servile position of the Niam-Niam women themselves; or, on the other, it may have been necessitated by the jealous temperament of their husbands. It is one of the fine traits in the Niam-Niam that they display an affection for their wives which is unparalleled among natives of so low a grade, and of whom it might be expected that they would have been brutalised by their hunting and warlike pursuits. A husband will spare no sacrifice to redeem an imprisoned wife, and the Nubians, being acquainted with this, turn it to profitable account in the ivory trade. They are quite aware that whoever possesses a female hostage can obtain almost any compensation from a Niam-Niam."

The Niam-Niam are governed by chiefs, whose power is absolute. They dispose of the lives of their subjects, inflict corporal punishments, such as the loss of fingers or ears, and decide upon peace or war. Nevertheless, they are careful not to attack a neighbouring power

without first consulting their auguries. They take an oily fluid, extracted from a red wood, and administer it to a hen; if the bird dies, the enterprise is doubtful; if it, on the contrary, survives, victory is assured and they take the field. In this latter case the men arm themselves with lances, arrows, shields, and trumbashes, sharp, pointed iron weapons, shaped something like a sickle. Their combats are furious, and they are rather addicted to eating their enemies after having killed them.

The journal of the expedition, however, states that the caravan made its way through the Niam-Niam country without having any of its members eaten, and without even receiving any proposition to that effect. "Joseph, from his corpulence and habitually flabby appearance," says M. Périères, "might well have made a few mouths water. Indeed, I occasionally saw a native cast a longing glance at him, but Joseph at once took refuge very close to us, and the poor Niam-Niam, disappointed of a delicacy, was compelled to fall back upon such ordinary dishes as dogs, monkeys, or reptiles, with manioc flour and sugar-cane juice 'to follow' in the shape of dessert."

In a word, the caravan did not encounter any serious danger, thanks, perhaps, to the number of rifles in its possession. At first, the Zandeys mistook these guns for lances,

calling them iron sticks, and laughing at them. But M. de Morin, as much to exercise his men as to make a display of his force, organized a course of target practice. The Niam-Niam were frightened to begin with, and then astonished; from that moment they looked upon the Europeans as superior beings, against whom it was useless to contend.

Miss Beatrice Poles was now, amongst these people, raised to the dignity of a demi-goddess. A box of lucifer matches did this for her. The natives, accustomed to produce fire only after great exertion, by rubbing one stick against another, were overwhelmed with amazement when they saw Miss Poles take a box from her pocket, produce a small match and light it at once. "She can make fire as she pleases," was the general exclamation, and they opened their eyes and mouths to such an extent as to make Joseph shiver in his shoes, for, notwithstanding the impunity which he enjoyed, and the delicacy displayed by the Niam-Niam towards him, he did not like to see their pointed teeth.

We have now given, to a certain extent, a *resumé* of the journal of the expedition in all that concerns the leading characteristics of the Niam-Niam.

Towards the middle of May, the caravan reached the river which separates the Zandey

territory from that of the Monbuttoos, where the serious business of the expedition was to commence, for at last they found themselves in the country where the guide, Nassar, alleged that he had met M. de Guéran eighteen months previously.

CHAPTER XXVII.

"We had scarcely set foot in the land of the Monbuttoos before, thanks to their perfect candour, we knew all about their tastes, for, when we proposed to do a little bartering, they brought us a quantity of bones, hands, jaws, and pieces of heads which must certainly have been the remains of their repasts. From that moment we quite agreed with Schweinfurth in his assertion that 'the cannibalism of the Monbuttoo is unsurpassed by any nation in the world. But,' continues that authority, 'with it all, the Monbuttoos are a noble race of men; men who display a certain national pride, and are endowed with an intellect and judgment such as few natives of the African wilderness can boast; men to whom one may put a reasonable question, and who will return a reasonable answer. The Nubians can never say enough in praise of their faithfulness in friendly intercourse, or of the order and stability of their national life.'"

I have given the opinion of the famous German traveller *verbatim;* now let us see for ourselves what conclusion should be come to as

regards this tribe. It covers an area of four thousand square miles, situated between 3° and 4° north latitude, 26° and 27° longitude east from Paris. This country, which boasts about a million inhabitants, is still, as it was two years ago, when Schweinfurth visited it, under the absolute sway of one single ruler, King Munza, a most despotic sovereign, who reigns in the western division, and who has delegated a portion of his power to his brother Degberra, Viceroy of the Eastern Provinces. But Munza alone is known, and science, we repeat, comes to a dead halt at the country of the Monbuttoos.

The journey we are about to undertake, if, indeed, what we hear about M. de Guéran leads us southwards, will land us in a blank space, about which, as far as we have gone, no one has been able to give us the slightest information. What news shall we gather about the stay of our fellow-countryman in the midst of this people, or about the route he took on quitting them? Is he, perchance, still here, kept prisoner by Munza? We are under one continual apprehension—a perpetual anxiety. If we put a question to a native, we at once think that he is sure to say something in reply about the white man whom he saw before we arrived on the scene, and who could not fail to have been an object of curiosity. But we can only hope to get reliable information from

Munza himself, in the midst of his court and in the full splendour of his surroundings, and, in order to reach the royal residence as quickly as possible, we never cease to stimulate the zeal of our escort and bearers.

Madame de Guéran has now taken up her position at the head of the caravan, by the side of the guide, Nassar, to impart, as she says, courage to those behind her. And, indeed, the sight of this brave, young, and perfectly lovely woman, always wearing the strikingly original costume, we have already described, produces a very great impression on our soldiers. To them she is no longer a being of this earth; she gives these infidels an idea of a very different world from the one they inhabit. They have always respected her, but now they revere and love her. She has succeeded in winning the sympathies, as well as in captivating the imaginations of all these Orientals.

All sorts of tales, and even legends, which we have more than once had the opportunity of hearing, are in circulation about her. "She is," say some, "the daughter of a mighty Northern Prince, and her father has sent her to us to travel and instruct herself." According to the Nubians, she is a powerful Sultana, whose husband had been made prisoner by the people of Khartoum; she is now in pursuit of them, and we shall all have to fight for her very soon. Then, with the exaggeration habitual

amongst negroes, they relate how she, in the desert, set free two thousand slaves, whom she sent away to her father's kingdom, where they are well-fed and wear beautiful clothes like hers.

We take very good care not to interfere with all this romancing, nor to keep the narrators within the region of fact; on the contrary, we ourselves invent numerous anecdotes calculated to enhance the reputation of our escort, and augment the *prestige* of our beloved leader. But will she be able to conquer, at first sight, this redoubtable King Munza, on whom our fate depends, in the same way that she has charmed these men, who have known her for six months?

Meanwhile, we do everything in our power to ingratiate ourselves with the monarch, whom we are overwhelming in advance by a series of presents conveyed to him by means of the couriers sent to meet us. These presents consist of ten pieces of calico, ten rolls of cloth, several carpets and coverings of various kinds, a lantern, a pair of scissors, a sabre, a sword, a guitar, five boxes of lucifer matches, and three pairs of socks filled with beads of all sorts. If Munza is not satisfied with this miscellaneous collection, he must be very hard to please. We have adhered strictly to the usages common in such cases, and no travellers have ever displayed more generosity than we

have. We, nevertheless, hold in reserve some other presents destined to complete the conquest of the monarch, to unloose his tongue on the subject of M. de Guéran, and to secure his permission for our continuing on our way southwards, should we deem it necessary.

Whilst waiting for the opportunity of making the acquaintance of Munza, let us say a few words about the subjects. And, first of all, one important remark; as regards their features, the Monbuttoos differ essentially from other black tribes, and bear on their countenances the impress of their Semitic origin. The tint of their complexion is much lighter than we have yet seen in Africa, being almost the colour of ground coffee. The features have a certain amount of delicacy about them; and occasionally an aquiline nose may be seen. But what distinguishes them chiefly from other tribes, their special characteristic is, that at least one out of every twenty of the population has greyish light hair, approaching the colour of hemp.

Their costume, which never varies, is quite original. It is composed of the bark of a tree called the *rokko* (a species of fig-tree), prepared with great care and stained red-brown, which, fastened round the waist by a girdle, covers the body from the chest to the knees. Their hair, dressed like that of the Niam-Niam, is surmounted by a sort of straw hat or cap.

If the men are almost entirely clothed, the women are not. They simply tattoo their bodies in elaborate patterns, representing flowers, stars, bees, the spots of a leopard, or the stripes of a zebra. When they go out they carry with them a strip of cloth which they lay across their laps as they sit down.

We are traversing the populous district of the Maogoos, governed by one of Munza's brothers, and we come to the banks of the Welle. Thanks to a number of canoes, thirty feet long by four broad, and hollowed out of enormous trunks of trees, which were placed at our disposal by the natives, we crossed the deep, dark waters of this river, to which travellers in search of the sources of the Nile have attached great importance.

On the western bank of the river, some emissaries of the King assumed the direction of the caravan and guided us towards the royal residence, situated in the midst of a region where an earthly paradise might well find a place. At each step we came across sparkling streamlets, ferns without number, plantations of bananas, manioc, and sugar cane, and immense fig-trees, whose leafy density the sun even could not penetrate. It is a superb garden, with marvellous vegetation, full of flowers and fruit, and enlivened by the songs of a thousand birds.

My brother Parisians, when I think that, at

the most moderate computation, nine-tenths of you picture Africa to yourselves as a vast desert, destitute of water and shade—wretched creatures that you are—there is not a country, perhaps, in the wide world that is watered by so many, and such great torrents and rivers, that is shaded by such gigantic trees, that is beautified by nature to such a luxuriant extent, as certain parts of central Africa. But I have no time to devote to refuting the errors of my fellow-countrymen, errors into which I formerly fell like the rest of them. Here we are, at last, within the private domain of Munza, and the only thing we have now to do is to obtain from that powerful despot the key to the enigma which is of such vital interest to us.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

The King had allotted to us, for the purposes of our camp, a large vacant space a little over two hundred yards from his own residence. And we had scarcely settled down, when, on the morning of the thirtieth of May, an officer presented himself to our interpreters with the information that his royal master would receive us that same day.

As we wished to appear before the African monarch in full splendour, we all devoted ourselves at once to the mysteries of the toilet. Since we left Khartoum we had not had any special reason for getting ourselves up regardless of expense, and it was, therefore, with a certain amount of satisfaction and a slight admixture of self-complacency, that we opened our portmanteaus, for the purpose of extracting therefrom the garments reserved for special occasions.

De Morin and I selected hunting tunics with carved buttons, white waistcoats, velvet caps, and splendid riding boots. Round our waists we wore leathern belts, which held our hunting knives, loaded revolvers, and a box of

cartridges, and these, with our carbines slung across our shoulders, completed our costume.

The Doctor adopted a semi-official "get-up" calculated to take the fancy of the blacks; a blue coat with large brass buttons, grey trousers, patent leather boots, a sword by his side, and a minature pistol in each waistcoat pocket.

Madame de Guéran also thought it advisable to change her walking costume for a fancy dress, half-European, half-Oriental, very much after the fashion of the one which had gained for her the title of the Parisian Sultana. When she burst upon us thus transformed, with an air of surprise at seeing herself look so enchanting, and with an eager, smiling look, we hastened to compliment her upon her appearance.

"Take care," she said, laughingly. "Your compliments verge upon insult. They seem to imply that I need the adjunct of dress, and that, only this morning, when in my travel-stained, sun-scorched clothes, I was scarcely to be tolerated."

Just as we were about to protest against this view of the matter, Miss Poles interposed, by saying—

"My dear Baroness, these gentlemen have not said anything really disparaging. Nature, you see, requires to be aided; the more generous she displays herself towards us, the more are we bound to do something for her. A

little bit of dress completes us, as it were, and imparts to us additional lustre."

Miss Poles herself, instead of putting on a new dress, had fixed in her hair an enormous bunch of red flowers, thrown a yellow shawl over her shoulders, and put on a pair of ten-buttoned, blue kid gloves. According to her own mode of expression, she had completed nature by appearing as a rainbow. It was, perhaps, an act of imprudence to let her go near Munza, but, of course, the moment it was decided that Madame de Guéran should visit the King, her companion was bound to follow suit.

Seriously speaking, I must record that we had frequently discussed the propriety of allowing the Baroness to be present at the audience vouchsafed by the African monarch. We could not know by intuition what sight was in store for us amongst these savages, or, under the pretext of doing us honour, what class of entertainment they would offer us. But, in the common interest, and in order to attain the object we had in view, we should not have been justified in displaying an excess of reserve or prudery, even when our companion was in question. Proud, as all negroes are, and susceptible, like all despots, to affront, Munza, who had for some time past been aware, from the reports of his emissaries, that we had a white woman with us, would have been naturally annoyed at her absence if she had

stayed away on the day when he condescended to give audience to foreigners. The wound thus inflicted upon his *amour-propre* might, from the very first moment, compromise us and cause us the greatest anxiety, and we therefore came to the conclusion not even to mention our scruples to Madame de Guéran.

Besides, we were quite capable of hiding from her anything that might offend her eye, and, in spite of our desire to ingratiate ourselves with the African potentate, if he took it into his head to honour us with any *fêtes* after the fashion of those indulged in by the Bongos, we should know perfectly well how to withdraw our fair leader to a considerable distance from his residence.

As soon as we had finished our toilet operations, we reviewed the escort. We had decided that the bearers should be left in camp, and that the Nubian and Dinka soldiers, our attendants and personal servants alone should accompany us.

The guide, Nassar, on this occasion, had found means to make the famous boots we had given him shine like a mirror, and our two Arab interpreters, who had put on clean bûrnus, were glitteringly white. Our female Soudan brigade, with their flowing tunics, hair well greased, shiny skins and bright eyes, looked magnificent, and the Nubians, with their bodies covered with their most highly-prized amulets,

in fighting array, and carbine in hand, were calculated to give a very flattering idea of the civilization of the northern tribes.

About two o'clock in the afternoon, another of Munza's officers came to fetch us, and we left our encampment in the following order. Half our escort, under the command of Nassar, marched in front. We followed, Madame de Guéran carried in her palanquin, Delange, de Morin, and I on horseback, followed by Joseph, dressed in black with a white tie, clean-shaved, smooth, and smiling. The other half of our escort, led by the interpreters, brought up the rear.

An immense crowd collected from all sides to see us, dancing, shouting, and expressing their admiration after the Monbuttoo fashion, by opening their mouths very wide and putting the palms of their hands before them. Our *cortége* would not have been able to make its way through this crowd if some officials, doing duty as policemen and armed with long poles, had not at intervals charged the crowd and laid about them indiscriminately.

Sorcerers, covered with rings, necklets, bracelets, and a thousand and one trinkets, rushed towards us to make speeches, but grave, dignified, calm, and majestic, we passed on without a single halt.

A courier arrives, panting, with a welcome from the King, and is off again like an arrow,

to convey our thanks and announce our speedy arrival.

At length we reach the palace gardens and are free from the mob, for none dare follow us within these sacred precincts. But they take their revenge by shouting in a most frenzied manner, and making a regular din with their drums and horns.

The palace consists of a group of large huts and sheds, for various purposes. One circular hut, with a conical roof, served as an armoury, and in it were displayed all the arms made in the country, which is very rich in iron and copper, and, in some places, lead ; others were used as magazines, where were stored, in perfect order, the provisions necessary for the crowd of servants of all grades and both sexes in the employ of Munza. Farther on, a cluster of buildings, surrounded by splendid trees, formed the private residence of the King. The officers sent to meet us had received orders to show us over the palace, whilst their master, detained at market, according to their account, got ready to receive us. They introduced us into a gallery, more than eighty yards long, the roof of which was up-held by five rows of pillars. The apartments of the King opened on to this gallery, and in one large room was an erection covered with skins and mats, and flanked by posts; this was the royal bed. From the sleeping apartment we passed to several rooms devoted to the King's wardrobe, where were a

number of elaborate costumes, which Munza alone wears, for the mode of dress amongst his subjects is unalterable. Suspended from the framework were hats, plumes of feathers, furs of every kind, tails of the giraffe, necklets made of the teeth of more than a hundred lions, and other ornaments, each more curious than its predecessor.

When we left these buildings, we were shown, but not allowed to enter, another group of about a hundred huts, surrounded by strong palisades. Here live the wives of Munza, eighty in number, and each possessing a separate residence. But the King's seraglio is not confined to these eighty individuals, dubbed with the title of royal wives. His father's wives also belong to him, since, according to African custom, on the death of a king his wives become the property of his successor.

As Miss Poles never could resist the temptation of making remarks about everything, she at this juncture declared in a very loud tone of voice "that it was perfectly shocking for any man to have so many wives." To soothe her I observed that as far as our information went, the women in question also performed the duties of cooks.

"You must remember," I said, "that the King eats in secret, apart from indiscreet curiosity, and none except his wives are allowed to touch his food."

"Well!" exclaimed Miss Poles, "and what

of that ? your explanation, so far from being satisfactory, gives me a still worse opinion of Mr. Munza. Fancy degrading a wife to the position of a cook ! It is monstrous, and only worthy of a barbarian."

" You forget, Miss Poles," said Delange, " that in two-thirds of the households both in Paris and London, the wife not only does the cooking but also scrubs the floors."

" Quite so, but that is when people cannot afford to keep a servant, which is not the case with this Mr. Munza."

Miss Poles pronounced the words " Mr. Munza " with a degree of contempt which must have annihilated that monarch if he had heard them.

This conversation was, fortunately, interrupted by the deafening noise of the horns and drums, announcing that the King had returned from the market and regained his palace. We saw him in the distance, accompanied by his guards and followed by his subjects, who saluted his ears with the cry, " Ee, Ee, tchupy, tchupy, Ee, Munza, Ee," which answers to the English, " Hip, hip, hurrah ! "

We were now shown into the audience chamber.

CHAPTER XXIX.

The building in which we found ourselves was destitute of walls, but was completely surrounded by a breast high palisading. A roof supported on gigantic tree-stems covered its entire length, about sixty metres, and a firm floor was obtained by means of layers of red clay.

Officers in full war costume, dignitaries of the kingdom, in their bark garments and with plumes of feathers in their hats, were seated on the low stools which, according to the African custom, they had brought with them. These individuals took up about two-thirds of the hall. The remaining portion was occupied by the throne, a bench furnished with a back and arms. On a leopard skin our presents were displayed to view, but, as if the monarch wished us to understand that he was accustomed to the generosity of white men, other objects of European manufacture appeared interspersed amongst our offerings, such as a silver platter, a porcelain vase, a telescope, a book with gilt edges, and a double mirror, which magnified on one side and diminished on the other.

The sight of these things produced a lively impression upon Madame de Guéran. Had they belonged to her husband, and been given by him to the African monarch? But de Morin, who was seated by her side, reminded her that Munza must have received these presents from Schweinfurth, and, indeed, that explorer expressly mentions the astonishment called forth by the mirror, and the King's error in taking the silver for white iron, and the porcelain for ivory.

On either side the throne, a large space was reserved for the royal wives, and behind, acting as a background, were large trophies of arms, made of gleaming copper and producing a most picturesque effect.

At last, the trumpets and ivory horns recommenced their deafening din, ringers marched about on all hands clanging their enormous bells, frenzied cries rent the air, and the royal *cortége* appeared on the scene.

Munza marched at its head. He is a man in the prime of life, handsome, tall, and with muscular limbs. From his almost regular features and beard, untouched by the razor, he might be taken for a denizen of the north, but his thick lips bespoke the negro. He was, if we may say so, clothed in copper, and might have passed for an animated cooking apparatus. A crescent of copper stood out from his forehead like the vizor of a helmet, and pointed plates of

the same metal encircled his neck; rings of copper were round his wrists and ankles ; in his hand he carried a scimitar of pure copper, and even the girdle round his loins, which held his red-stained garment of rokko bark, was hung with large copper balls. That part of his body which was not hidden from view by these ornaments, was seen to be anointed with an unguent of the colour of Pompeian red. Finally, he wore on his head a cylindrical hat made of reeds, according to the fashion of the tribe, and surmounted by a scarlet aigrette made of parrot's feathers.

As soon as he entered the hall, the shouts of "Ee, ee, tchupy, tchupy, ee, Munza, ee," redoubled.

Without turning his head he, from time to time, opened his mouth and ejaculated, "Brr," in a sonorous voice, in recognition of the enthusiasm of his subjects.

With upright carriage, head erect, and arms close to his sides, he walked with measured, but somewhat theatrical, tread. He looked neither at his court nor at us, and if it had not been for his gleaming eyes, the cruel smile which played round his lips, and his energetic "Brr," one would have thought that his motionless head was made of bronze.

He took his seat on his throne, and his wives, who followed him, at once took theirs on the small stools carried for them by slaves. The

ladies of the court resembled the other women of the tribe, whom we have described, in every respect, including both their lack of beauty and covering; only, their splendid hair was decorated, as a distinctive mark of their rank, with a larger number of metal plates, ivory pins, and porcupine quills. Some of them, the best made and least ugly, wore also necklaces of beads of Venetian glass, which Schweinfurth had obtained from his friend Miani, and had, two years previously, presented to the Monbuttoo king.

These artistic beads did not resemble in any way those which we had purchased in Paris; they were easily recognised, from the description given of them by the German explorer, and we came to the immediate conclusion that Munza, too proud to wear any ornament of foreign manufacture, had handed them over to his favourite wives.

As soon as the court was seated, we thought we might venture to follow suit. We were placed about fire yards from the King, the intervening space between him and us being unoccupied.

Our host contrived to affect not to see us, and, with his body half turned away from us, his legs crossed, and his right arm resting on the back of his throne, he held in his left hand a pipe quite six feet long, from which he took an occasional whiff. Then, returning the pipe

to one of his wives, he with a certain amount of grace, allowed the smoke to curl from his mouth.

From time to time, by way of refreshment, he regaled himself with a green banana, a cola nut, or a piece of sugar cane, all which dainties were ready to his hand.

"Well," said Miss Poles, turning towards us, "This is a queer way of receiving us. Is this what they call an audience in these parts?"

"A dumb show," replied de Morin, who had lighted a cigarette, and was doing his best to smoke as majestically as the King of the Monbuttoos.

"But we did not come here merely to look at this man," resumed Miss Poles.

"You could not do better at all events," said Delange. "The powerful monarch whom you, with that want of ceremony which is one of your greatest charms, call 'this man,' is a splendid specimen of his class. Of that you may rest assured, as well as that, if he were to pay Paris a visit, the whole place would go mad about him."

"I do not doubt it in the least," replied Miss Poles, drily. "You Parisians are capable of any amount of aberration."

"But," I asked, "my dear Miss Poles, if you have not come here to admire King Munza, as is the case with all his court, what are your intentions?"

"I am astonished, M. Périères," replied Miss Poles, "that you should ask me such a question. Are not my intentions yours? Ought we not, by means of our interpreters, to ask the King for information about M. de Guéran?"

De Morin stopped her quickly.

"Do not breathe that name," said he.

"Why? You do not wish—"

"Certainly not. At least, not now."

"I don't understand."

"You will very soon. If the King has any motive for holding his tongue, or misleading us with regard to our fellow-countryman, his courtiers must not hear his answers, lest, later on, we should fail to get more reliable replies from them."

"That is very true," I added, and, turning to Miss Poles, I said—"Do not forget for a moment that you are in the presence of a despot, before whom all these people bow down and worship in fear and trembling. You will not find any one of them of much use to you, if, by pleasing you, he would run the risk of displeasing the King."

"Then," exclaimed our Englishwoman, "we ought to have asked for a private audience."

"Do not be uneasy. We intend to ask for a private audience, but for to-day we must put up with what is given to us. Besides, we rather mistrust the presence of all these hangers-on."

"If we cannot speak to-day, let us go."

"Go? Where is your politeness, Miss Poles?"

"Does the King show us any?"

"You mean that he does not speak to us?"

"Precisely so."

"And suppose he has nothing to say?"

"What nonsense! Nothing to say, indeed! Cannot he ask us for news about our country, or yours—about England or France?"

"If I were to tell him that ours was in the full swing of a republic," said de Morin, "I am afraid he would not understand me. King Munza appears to me to turn a deaf ear to our advanced ideas."

"However that may be, as an Englishwoman, I am annoyed at the want of respect shown towards me, and, moreover, I do not feel at all comfortable amongst all these men."

"Now, really, Miss Poles," replied Delange, with his usual coolness, "that is unreasonable. If anyone ought to feel uncomfortable, it should be Périères, de Morin, and I, in the presence of all these women. But we look at you—and forget them."

"Your fine speeches are thrown away upon me," said Miss Poles, who appeared to have changed her mind with regard to Delange, and spoke with a considerable amount of acerbity, "I am determined to break in upon this silence and compel the King to look at us."

"He is looking at you already."

"I declare it is true," exclaimed Miss Poles, blushing.

The fact was that Munza, tired of having "posed" for the gallery, and of affecting an indifference which he was far from feeling, had for a moment past been looking sidelong at us. Only, Miss Poles was not the one who had attracted his attention. In spite of his savage nature, he was undoubtedly struck with the beauty of Madame de Guéran, and it was on her that his stealthy looks were cast from time to time, between the whiffs of his pipe.

"Suppose I approach him and speak to him," said Miss Poles, suddenly. "I have evidently succeeded in attracting his attention, and, very possibly, in pleasing him, too."

"Do not do anything of the sort," exclaimed Nassar, who, as our interpreter, was seated close to us. "Nobody has a right to approach the throne, unless invited to do so. It is a crime which Munza invariably punishes by death."

"And do not forget," continued de Morin, surrounding himself with a cloud of smoke, "that this man, as you call him, has only to lift up his finger to put all of us on the spit. Look at our Nubians; they are so sensible of the danger that, quite contrary to their habits, they remain silent and motionless. As for Joseph, he is perfectly paralyzed by fear; if his neighbours do but open their mouths he trembles

in every limb, and if the King should happen to say 'Brr' again I believe my unfortunate valet will collapse altogether."

This further remonstrance did not convince Miss Poles, but she kept quiet, for the King at last gave some signs of life.

CHAPTER XXX.

He rose, and received from the hands of one of his wives an article something like those well-known playthings for babies, usually called rattles. It was made of a wicker stick, with a little basket at the end filled with pebbles. It was the monarch's *bâton*, and he wielded it pompously, like a regular leader of the orchestra. At once the trumpets, ivory horns, kettle drums, bells large and small, and all kinds of music, both iron and copper, including all the kitchen utensils of the Monbuttoos, honoured us with a hubbub even more discordant than the former one.

Occasionally the orchestra ceased, to allow of a solo being performed. A musician stepped to the front, and produced from a huge trumpet sounds intended to represent the sough of the wind, the songs of birds, the rumbling of a storm, or the roaring of lions. Amongst this primitive race, what is called imitative music is always highly esteemed.

The concert was brought to a close by renewed shouts of "Ee, Ee, tchupy, tchupy, Ee, Munza, Ee."

The monarch took his seat once more on the throne, and it dawned upon us that, after having allowed us to admire him from a plastic point of view, and as a *chef d'orchestre*, he was at length disposed to enter into conversation.

Nassar having by my order stepped forward into the empty space between us and the King, that royal personage intimated his wish to speak with the chief of the caravan.

As soon as this request was translated to us, we begged de Morin to represent us. He got up accordingly, took his stool, placed it in the small reserved space, and quietly seated himself by the side of Nassar and in front of the King, as unembarrassed as if he had been at his club.

But Munza did not appear to be satisfied with this arrangement, de Morin, apparently, not being the one he wanted. At the same time he pointed to Joseph, both by look and gesture.

"That is not the chief," said Nassar. "That is a servant, a slave. You cannot converse with a slave, O King."

"No, no, it is the chief," persisted Munza, pointing now to Joseph's coat and necktie.

We understood at once. When Schweinfurth was received by the King, two years previously, he wore, as a *savant*, a black coat and white necktie. Seeing our servant in this official guise, exactly like that worn by the German

traveller, Munza thought that Joseph was the most important personage amongst us.

Nassar took upon himself to explain away the error, but it was with considerable difficulty that he succeeded in doing so, the King saying over and over again, "The white man was dressed in that way. Why does your slave wear the same clothes as the great chief?"

He would have looked upon us as impostors if we had told him that with us the leading men in the country, ministers, and sovereigns wear precisely the same dress as the most disreputable waiter in an eating-house. We were thus compelled to seek another explanation, and, in order not to depreciate Schweinfurth in the monarch's estimation, we declared that, during the last two years, the fashion in our country had undergone a complete revolution, and that de Morin, Delange, and I alone wore the costume befitting our exalted rank. This was not very intelligible to the ruler of a people amongst whom fashion never changes, but Munza, nevertheless, condescended to accept the explanation, or, as was far more likely the case, with that quickness of perception of which, later on, we had too many proofs, he recognised, after having examined de Morin and Joseph attentively, that it is not the cowl which makes the monk.

With the assistance of Nassar, conversation between my friend and the African King was speedily in full swing. The latter had resumed

his nonchalant attitude, and continued to emit from his pipe, at regular intervals, whiffs of smoke, which he sent curling through the air. De Morin, with a cigar in his mouth, astride on his diminutive bench, his right leg slightly raised, and his hands clasping his knee, had posed himself after a somewhat peculiar fashion, which, it is to be hoped, Munza considered respectful.

Profound silence reigned throughout our escort and amongst the wives and courtiers of the King. His Majesty was about to speak, and no one dared say a word.

The very first words uttered by Munza showed the Europeans that they had to deal with a man of intelligence, and that they must be on their guard accordingly.

"Who are you? Whence come you? And what motive has brought you to my dominions?" asked his Majesty of Monbuttoo.

"We are," replied de Morin, "personages of importance in our country, and we are travelling for our own pleasure and to see you."

"How have you heard about me?"

"From Schweinfurth, who has praised your virtue, your power, and your generosity. Far away, in the North, the kings, the nobles, and the people talk about you."

Munza appeared flattered; his eyes brightened, and he drew himself up.

"And has the white man only spoken well of me?"

"Certainly; you were always good to him."

"It is true; but I did not grant his request to be permitted to go towards the south, as he wished. Did you know that?"

"Yes, I not only knew that, but also the motives of your refusal."

The King seemed astonished.

"Tell me them. I desire you to tell me," he said.

"I ask nothing better," replied de Morin, "and the more so because I agree with you. You feared that the merchant, Aboo Sammit, who accompanied Schweinfurth, would establish commercial relations with the other kingdoms, south, east, and west, which border on yours. If Schweinfurth, instead of being accompanied by Aboo Sammit, had been alone, you would have allowed him to cross your territory, as you will certainly permit us to do, seeing that we are not engaged in either the ivory or the slave trade."

"Ah!" said the African monarch, "you want to go southwards."

"We intend," replied de Morin, boldly, "to ask your permission to do so."

Munza, for the first time, looked our friend full in the face, and said to him—

"You have not, then, as you stated, left your country simply for the sake of seeing me, because you also wish to know my neighbour?"

The observation was shrewd enough, but, fortunately, de Morin did not move a muscle.

"We are come," said he, "to pay you a visit, but we must go back to our own country, and we do not wish to do so by the same way that we came."

"But, since you have come from the north, you must take the road back to the north. Why, then, do you talk of going south?"

"Because in the south I shall find the sea, and vessels which will take me back to my country, to the north, without my having the trouble of walking there."

"The sea!" repeated the King, slowly. "Yes, the white man spoke to me about that, but I did not understand him. Explain to me, if you can, what the sea is."

"Have you any lakes in your country—what they call in the east the Nyanzas?"

"No. I have not any."

"But you have plenty of rivers?"

"Rivers? Yes, yes—the Gadda, the Keebally—"

"Good! The sea is composed of a vast number of rivers, without banks, ranged one alongside the other."

Munza shut his eyes to conjure up the figure thus presented to him. Did he succeed? We never knew, for he did not again utter a word on the subject. All the Europeans who have ever attempted to give the central tribes an idea

of the ocean have failed. It has been often remarked that their imagination cannot grasp the notion. De Morin would, possibly, have done better, had he taken the sky as his point of comparison, and endeavoured to explain that the sea was a sky turned upside down, whose limits the eye is powerless to reach, and which lies ahead instead of being above.

"So," resumed the King, "it is to rejoin the sea that you wish to cross my territory and reach the south?"

"Principally for that reason, but I have also another motive."

"Tell it to me."

"Not now; there are too many people present, and white men are not in the habit of telling everybody their secrets. When you are kind enough to grant me, and my friends here, a private audience, we will tell you the real aim of our journey."

"Very well," said the King, secretly flattered by the confidence thus reposed in him, as well as by the distinction drawn between his subjects and himself, "I will receive you to-morrow, at sunset."

He was silent for a moment, but we could easily perceive that he had something else to say. With his right elbow resting on the arm of his throne, and his head supported on his hand, he looked every now and then in our direction, and Madame de Guéran appeared invariably to

attract his attention. His black almond-shaped eyes were constantly turned towards her, and he evidently wished to put certain questions to us, but at the same time was afraid of appearing to take too great an interest in us, lest by so doing he should lose some of his dignity.

At length his curiosity got the better of his pride, and, addressing Nassar, he said—

"Ask the chief who the two white men are who are sitting near him?"

He was taking a roundabout way to get at Madame de Guéran, who interested him far more than we did.

As soon as Nassar had translated the question, de Morin replied unhesitatingly that we were his two brothers. Pointing to me, he said that I was a very learned man, able to write as Schweinfurth had done in Munza's presence. Delange he described as a great doctor, capable of curing all diseases.

"And that old woman there?" asked the King, suddenly, nodding towards Miss Poles.

Nassar, who had a grudge against our beloved Englishwoman, occasionally somewhat hasty with him, instead of toning down the expression made use of by Munza, repeated it in a loud and very distinct tone of voice. This was all the more cruel towards Miss Beatrice, because when the King looked at her, and before he had called her an old woman, she had half risen from her seat, had taken off her spectacles

to produce a more magical effect, and had smiled in her most gracious manner.

When she heard the words—"and that old woman there"—she at first fell back on her seat as if she had been shot, but then she jumped up, with flashing eye and burning cheek, and thus apostrophised the King.

"An old woman! An old woman! That savage, that Goth, that cannibal—to call me an old woman! Do you not know, you wretched thing, that in your seraglio there is not a woman fit to be named in the same breath with me? Old! I, to be called old at my age!"

In spite of all our efforts, we could not succeed in calming our irate companion. Madame de Guéran alone managed it by telling her that in the countries where we were a woman is considered old at twenty, and that she herself, notwithstanding her evident youth, would be put in the same category with Miss Poles.

The King, without taking any notice of the exclamations and gesticulations of Miss Poles, or paying the slightest attention to a scene, which, by the way, must have been quite unintelligible to him, went on eating his bananas and cola nuts. He had, however, the politeness to offer a banana to de Morin, who, still astride on his stool, with his back to us, munched it quietly and, through the medium of Nassar, gave the king some *sotto voce* particulars about

Miss Poles which seemed to amuse his Majesty.

At last, Munza, giving up all circuitous questioning and beating about the bush, said to Nassar abruptly—

"The white woman," looking towards Madame de Gućran, "is, doubtless, the chief's wife?"

Our interpreter, who had been cautioned not to give any reply unless dictated by us, duly translated the question.

"Tell him," said de Morin, "that I have no wife."

The King, as soon as this reply was conveyed to him, opened his mouth to its utmost limits in token of amazement, and all his court imitated his example, a proceeding which frightened Joseph and the Nubians of the escort awfully. They thought the dinner hour was come, and that they would be the *pièce de resistance.*

As for the women, they simply roared with laughter, although they were accustomed not to indulge in any such demonstrations in the presence of their royal spouse. He, too, led away by the example of his surroundings, ended by bursting into a fit of laughter. This Sultan, possessing from three to four hundred wives, counting his mothers-in-law and sisters-in-law, could with difficulty understand a man being destitute of a single one. But his merriment was only transitory. His countenance re-

covered its serious, apathetic expression, and he requested that de Morin would point out which of his companions was the husband of the white woman.

"She is not the wife of any of us," replied de Morin. "She is our sister."

"Ah! Their sister! Very good!" said Munza, repeating his remark two or three times.

Nevertheless, he did not appear convinced. Amongst the Africans, family affection is very slight and does not imply any obligation. A wife may accompany her husband to war or on any other expedition, but his mothers, daughters, or sisters do not carry their devotion to this extreme. Consequently, Munza, after a moment's reflection, gave utterance to his doubts. It seemed extraordinary to him that the white woman should have undertaken so long a journey, and should have come as far as his dominions merely in order that she might not be separated from her brothers.

Our friend saw that he had failed to give an intelligible explanation of Madame de Guéran's presence amongst us, and therefore hastened to say—

"I never said that our sister had not a private reason for accompanying us. It is precisely to explain this reason to the King that we have asked for a private audience."

On hearing this, Munza thought it high time to close the proceedings.

Nothing could have been easier. He made a sign, and immediately the court, accustomed to obey his slightest look, commenced the hymn, "Ee, Ee, tchupy, tchupy, Ee, Munza, Ee." He responded with a stentorian, "Brr," addressed, apparently to us, and left the hall with the same majestic step with which he had entered it, followed by all his wives, and the sound of kettle-drums, bells, trumpets, ivory horns, and "all kinds of music."

CHAPTER XXXI.

It appeared that Munza had shown us the greatest marks of favour. As a rule he received strangers very coldly and rarely addressed them, and to converse with any one at such length as he had done with us was a mark of distinguished regard.

We could estimate our advance in royal favour by comparing the attitude of his courtiers after his departure with their manner towards us before his arrival. Two hours previously they had been silent and reserved, but now they showed themselves eager to make our acquaintance, polite, and rather troublesome. They surrounded us and asked all sorts of questions, jostling each other to inspect us closely and touch our clothes. Some presumptuous hands reached our faces, and we were obliged to rap the knuckles of the most importunate with the handles of our hunting knives. Assisted by Nassar and our interpreter, we made a regular ring round Madame de Guéran, and were, fortunately, able to prevent any one from coming near her.

Miss Poles was, also, the object of the most

lively curiosity; her spectacles were a source of wonder, and her general appearance was evidently bewildering. But we were not at all uneasy about the fair Beatrice; she was a woman eminently calculated to take care of herself, and she did not fall short of our expectations, her hands being very busy about the ears of those who came too near her.

After having left the audience hall and traversed the courts and gardens of the palace, we found ourselves once more in the midst of the crowd, who, to do honour to their King's guests, treated us to some more music, and escorted us as far as our camp. Then, and only then, did we get rid of their too pressing attentions, thanks entirely to our bearers, who had occupied their leisure moments, during our absence, in enclosing our kraal with a strong palisading. By a delicate attention, evidently due to Munza himself, who was alive to the spirit of curiosity inherent in his subjects, we were also furnished with a guard of fifty men, armed with long poles, who patrolled round the encampment and kept all intruders away.

Nor was this all. Another right royal surprise awaited us, for in the hut, constructed for the reception of our baggage and food, we found the most valuable present we could possibly have had under the circumstances. It consisted of provisions of all kinds—grain, vegetables, fruit, fowls, goats, and beer. Our

host had foreseen all our wants and our wishes, and if he had shown himself but little disposed to be communicative towards us, he was lavish enough in other ways.

We lost no time in despatching to him, as a present, a novel object, calculated to take the fancy of all Africans, although they have not the remotest idea how to use it and are very likely to break it. It was a tolerably large musical box. To it we added a capital watch, the case of which was copper, silver and gold being unknown in this country and invariably mistaken for tin and copper.

Whilst waiting for the repast being prepared for us by our head-cook, a Nubian *cordon-bleu*, assisted by two Soudan women, also well-versed in the culinary art, we reviewed the incidents of the day. It is clear that Munza, in appearance at all events, is well disposed towards us; but will he be able to give us the desired information, which he will be asked to impart during our interview to-morrow? We begin to have our doubts about it. During his conversation with de Morin, not a single allusion, however indirect, was made to M. de Guéran. The King talked about Schweinfurth, and recollected him perfectly, albeit the African memory is treacherous to a degree, but he did not say a single word bearing on our countryman.

Why this reserve? To what end this

silence? Does not Munza know anything? Has he never seen M. de Guéran? Is he ignorant that this European has passed through his dominions, a fact testified to by Nassar, and recorded by our countryman himself in his letters? It is difficult to give credence to this apparent want of knowledge. How is it possible that a despot, surrounded by innumerable emissaries, should have failed to be warned of the arrival of a white man in his kingdom?

We summoned Nassar, and asked him if the silence of the King had not surprised him, if he did not expect Munza to mention M. de Guéran, whose visit to him was of later date than that of Schweinfurth? Our guide replied that he had quite expected the King to mention M. de Guéran, but he added that the negroes easily forget what is reported to them on the subject of any conversation, and remember facts alone. Munza had seen Schweinfurth, received him at court, and shaken hands with him; these were facts, and he could remember them. M. de Guéran, on the other hand, was only known to him by hearsay, and, therefore, may have escaped his memory.

"You admit, then," I asked, "that our countryman may have passed through this country without seeing the King?"

"Certainly," replied Nassar. "Fearing to be stopped by Munza, as my master, Schwein-

furth was, he very probably continued his route southwards, without halting here."

"Nevertheless, he did halt, for, according to your own account, you entertained him for twenty-four hours."

"Not in this district," answered Nassar, quickly. "It was in a territory lying to the south-east of us, forming part of Munza's kingdom, but under the administration of Degberra, one of his brothers. I was there, as I have already told you, managing a branch trading establishment, belonging to Aboo-Sammit, and Munza does not allow any depôt to be set up in the provinces governed by himself in person."

This explanation was probable enough. Indeed, M. de Guéran alluded in his letter to the kingdom of the Monbuttoos, but he did not mention the name of Munza. This latter personage, therefore, may, as Nassar suggests, very well have forgotten the accidental presence, in his dominions, of a stranger whom he never saw. By making an appeal to his memory, we shall, doubtless, obtain some useful hints.

Thanks to the liberality of the African potentate, our dinner, the best we have had for the last three months, was a very cheerful meal. Joseph alone, who waited on us as usual, was melancholy in the extreme. He handed us the dishes with an air of sadness, trembling at the slightest sound; if any of us asked for a knife

and fork in a louder tone than usual, he turned pale, and once I caught him in the act of wiping his eyes on the table-napkin which hung over his arm.

And yet, he ought to be in good spirits and proud of the part he played during the day. The monarch of a mighty nation, one of those sovereigns who is feared and respected without any reservation or opposition, such as is so often the case in Europe, had condescended to address him personally, and had for a moment taken him to be the leader of the caravan. Was it that he could not realize his good fortune? Did he now despise those gratifying tributes to his *amour-propre*, formerly so eagerly sought after by him? What was passing in his troubled spirit?

At dessert we demanded an explanation. He hesitated at first and begged to be excused, but at last, under the pressure of renewed importunities, he struck a theatrical attitude, and exclaimed suddenly, and in stilted tones—

"*Timeo Danaos et dona ferentes.*"

We looked at him with amazement, and then burst out laughing.

"You know Latin, it appears," said de Morin, when he had recovered his composure.

"Certainly," replied Joseph, bridling. "Before I went to service, I was in the fourth class at a provincial school."

"What are you talking about? You were in

the fourth class—you! In what capacity—professor, perhaps?"

"No sir."

"Pupil, then?"

"No, sir, nor pupil either."

"What then? Out with it."

"As a servant, sir. I brushed the clothes, swept the room, lighted the fires, and whilst attending to these duties, I listened to the lectures of the Professors, read the exercise books of the pupils, and gained instruction."

"Then," continued de Morin, making frantic efforts to prevent himself from laughing in the face of his servant, "you know the meaning of the sentence you have quoted?"

"Certainly, sir," replied Joseph. "*Timeo Danaos et dona ferentes* means, I fear the Greeks, especially when they come with gifts in their hands."

"A perfect translation, but why did you let fly the quotation full in our faces in this unexpected fashion?"

"Sir," said Joseph, with a most serious air, "I consider that it has a local signification, for the Greeks, according to my idea, are represented by the Monbuttoos, and the word 'gifts' means food, provisions, meals. The quotation, therefore, stands as if I had said—'I fear the Monbuttoos, and the meals with which they are providing us.'"

"And why this fear, Joseph?" asked de

Morin. "Do you think that the food is poisoned? It is rather late in the day to tell us so."

"No, sir, but I cannot divest myself of the idea that this nation of cannibals is overwhelming us with provisions and fattening us up, so that later on they may dine off us with greater enjoyment."

De Morin could not contain himself any longer. He roared with laughter, and we all joined him.

Joseph appeared perfectly scandalized at the unseemly mirth, and kept on saying—

"It is not my own opinion that I have given utterance to. It is the opinion of all the bearers, and their only motive for working so hard at the construction of a palisade round the camp was their fear of being attacked to-night. Alas! will it protect us?"

CHAPTER XXXII.

In spite of the fears indulged in by Joseph and our escort, we passed a very good night in our huts, which were far more comfortable than any we had inhabited for many a long day. On the following morning everybody awoke uneaten, and as our audience was not to take place until the afternoon, we set to work to fill up our leisure time.

Towards 8 a.m. de Morin, Delange and I bent our steps towards a small stream pointed out to us on the previous evening, and there, in the clear water, shaded from the sun's rays by a canopy of foliage, flowers and creepers, we enjoyed a most delicious and refreshing bath. This over, we went to the market, and nothing more picturesque can be imagined than these large gatherings, which in Africa have become, if I may be allowed to use the term, regular institutions. The market is a perfect pleasure-ground for buyers and sellers, rich and poor, large and small, men who go to see, and women who go to be seen. The animation and noise are on a par, extraordinary alike; shouting and laughing are heard on all sides—bargaining

here, quarrelling there, and fighting everywhere. Fruits and vegetables are jumbled together in one vast confusion—manioc, sweet potatoes, known amongst the Monbuttoos as *mendo*, yams, bananas and bundles of the sugar-cane. Earthen jars of artistic design, covered with figures in relief, hold the beer and other liquors.

On our return to camp, at about two o'clock in the afternoon, we were honoured by a visit from the favourite wives of the King. These ladies, in number about twenty, were far more reserved in their manner than we could have expected. It is true that they had had a lesson from Munza, and he was not to be disobeyed with impunity.

Some of them, nevertheless, betrayed such an unmistakable desire to pass their fingers through the beard and hair of a white man, that we felt bound to gratify them. But as neither of us was anxious to sacrifice himself, de Morin summoned Joseph, made him sit down on a stool, and authorised our amiable visitors to make use of his head as if it were a barber's block. Joseph, at first flattered by experiencing the contact of so many royal hands, displayed a tendency in the direction of protest and self-defence when his beard was plucked and his hair pulled to see if they were really attached by nature to his skin. We pointed out to him that the King's wives would bear in mind his amiability, would be a means, some day, perhaps,

of saving him from being eaten, and that, from every point of view, it would be better for him to lose a lock of hair than his head. He saw the force of this argument, and resigned himself to his fate, crying out, when the tugs were too forcible, in such a ludicrous way that the women were in fits of laughter.

After having toyed with Joseph's hair and beard, the Monbuttoos expressed a further wish. Until we appeared on the scene they had been accustomed to see men and women bare-footed; our large boots puzzled them, and they longed to know whether the pieces of leather which encased our feet and legs were a part of ourselves and natural, or whether they were merely a covering, like the rest of our clothes. We thought that these charming searchers after knowledge had learnt quite enough for one visit, and we consequently postponed until another opportunity the fresh study which they wanted to take in hand. Having at length dismissed them with a few presents, we were at liberty to take a spell of well-earned repose until the hour fixed for our private audience. But punctually at six o'clock we started for the palace, accompanied by Nassar and a dozen soldiers.

Miss Poles was with us, the King having, since the morning, been restored to her good graces, thanks to Delange, who, fearing a scene, had given Nassar a hint or two. The latter,

in consequence, lost no time in requesting that our beloved Englishwoman would grant him an interview, in order that he might confess to her his fears and regrets. He feared, according to the tale he now told, that he had misunderstood Munza's idea on the subject of Miss Poles; the word "old woman" had certainly not been uttered by the monarch; the interpreter had made a mistake, and had given a wrong translation of the Monbuttoo expression, which, as he had subsequently ascertained, meant in reality "pretty woman," or "uncommon woman."

Miss Poles eagerly accepted this explanation, just as everybody invariably does put implicit faith in whatever is pleasing, and in rare good humour, radiant, and got up regardless of expense, she accompanied us to the palace.

We were received at the outside palisading, and were at once conducted to the building in which the King's residence is situated. But, as we were about to enter the gallery already described, an officer made his appearance with the information that the King would only give audience to the white woman.

We stopped in astonishment. What did this whim mean? What peculiar notion had crossed the brain of the African monarch? Why were we to be separated from Madame de Guéran, and shut out from the interview?

"What do you think?" said I, turning to my friends.

"I think," replied de Morin, "that this savage is mad, and needs to be brought to his senses."

"And you?" said I, turning to Delange, who did not appear to be quite so angry as de Morin.

"We must not give in to him," replied the Doctor.

"Give in to him!" exclaimed de Morin. "I should think not indeed! Who could possibly dream of allowing Madame de Guéran to venture alone into that den? If that is even taken into consideration for a moment, I will force my way into the palace, revolver in hand, and shoot this insolent savage as I would a dog."

"Calm yourself, my dear fellow," said I to our friend. "Nobody has any idea of truckling to the King's caprices."

Then, turning to Madame de Guéran, I added—

"I must apologise for having consulted our friends first, but when your safety is in question we have a right, as you well know, seeing that you have given us that right, to take counsel amongst ourselves alone. But you agree with us, do you not?"

"Absolutely," replied the Baroness, in her calm, sweet voice. "I have no idea if the *tête-à-tête* asked for would be dangerous, or if I should run any risk in this palace. But, on the one hand, this demand is calculated to lower your status, and, on the other, if we yield to this first whim, we shall soon have to face others

far more serious. These savages are very like children; comply with their first demands, and you convert them into despots."

"What must we do, then?" I asked, still addressing Madame de Guéran.

"Withdraw, and give up all idea of the audience, in which, moreover, I feel assured that we should not have learnt a single thing we want to know."

"That is precisely my idea," said I.

"And mine, too," chimed in Delange.

De Morin, alone, did not speak, evidently regretting that he was not allowed to shoot the King like a dog.

We were going, therefore, to turn to the right-about, when Miss Beatrice, who dearly loved to have the last word, stopped us and begged us to hear what she had to say.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

What could she have to say to us? What important communication was she thinking of making, at a time when prudence counselled the earliest possible departure, now that we had determined upon not giving way to the will of the King?

"We will hear you," said Delange to her, "but be quick, I beg; all these consultations are dangerous just now."

"Make your minds quite easy," replied Miss Beatrice. "I will be brief. Before letting you come to so important a resolution, one which may have a serious influence over our future, I merely wish to ask you one question."

"Ask it, Miss Poles, ask it."

"Are you sure," she commenced, pushing her glasses up from her eyes, "that the King meant Madame de Guéran, that it is with her that he desires an interview?"

Delange looked at de Morin, who looked at me, whilst I looked at Nassar, whose eyes were fixed on the Baroness. Nobody as yet perceived the drift of Miss Beatrice's remarks.

"I wish you to observe," she continued,

"that the name of Madame de Guéran has never been mentioned, for the very simple reason that nobody knows it. The officer simply stated that the King would only receive the white woman. What white woman does he mean? The Baroness or me? I labour under the impression that I am as white as she is."

Our eyes were opened at last, and it was with great difficulty that we kept our countenances. Miss Poles resumed—

"There are occasions in one's life when ordinary considerations fail to have any effect. I have reason to believe that Munza meant me. Yesterday, during the audience, he never ceased to look at me; he smiled at me, and graciously offered me a banana and a cola nut. Lastly, you now know from our interpreter that instead of calling me an old woman, he said I was a pretty one. All these things put together, notwithstanding my entire freedom from conceit—I might almost say, my deep humility—impel me to ask you if you are not on a wrong scent, if I am not the one with whom the King desires a private interview."

I had turned away to hide my laughter, and de Morin had followed my example; Delange alone confronted Miss Poles.

"It is quite possible," said he to her, "that the King did mean you; I indeed am inclined to be of that opinion. But that does not alter the situation in any way whatever; in the first

place, Munza insults us by not permitting us to accompany you ; in the second, we cannot allow you to present yourself before him alone."

"But," she urged, "if this is a matter affecting our common interests, I am quite ready to run any risk. I am not afraid of anybody, and, besides, I have no reason to think that the King would behave otherwise than as a gentleman to any woman, to say nothing of my being an Englishwoman."

"We do not share your ideas on this subject," said Delange, firmly, "and, for my part, I absolutely refuse to let you enter that den alone. Have the kindness to come away with us, for we are off."

De Morin had by this time put himself at the head of the escort, and I, approaching the officer who had conveyed to us his master's orders, told him to inform the King that we were accustomed never to be separated from our sister, and that we were going away because he refused to receive us with her.

"What you have just done, gentlemen," said Miss Poles, as she followed us, "may turn out to be a serious business."

"It would have been far more serious," whispered de Morin, in my ear, "if we had sent her to the King, instead of Madame de Guéran. Munza would have scarcely thought the joke a good one, and he would have been right. But keep your eyes open all round, my dear fellow,

whilst I look after the escort. At this very moment our reply is being communicated to the King, and he knows by this time that we are going away. He will be furious, and we have every reason to be afraid."

"That is so," said I. "A man accustomed to bend every will to his own, the demi-god of more than a million souls, will hardly believe that a handful of foreigners dare to refuse all obedience to him, and brave him even within the walls of his palace."

Happily, our fears were groundless, and we proceeded without the slightest *contretemps* across the open space which separated us from the palisading. The building occupied by Munza, wherein we had declined to set foot, remained in perfect silence. Nobody came out of it, either to order us to return or to give any instructions to the soldiers whom we could see on every side of us. We soon reached the gate, and a very few moments more saw us within our own encampment.

De Morin prudently forbade all straggling on the part of the men of the escort; he inspected their guns and, without actually serving out the ammunition, he opened our boxes of cartridges and had them in readiness for any emergency. The rest of our people, who, as Joseph had stated, placed very little confidence in the Monbuttoos, approved of these precautions. At the same time we removed the

injunction laid, as I have already recorded, upon Nassar with reference to any conversation on the subject of the Baron de Guéran, and we now instructed him to mix with the natives, large and small, who surrounded our encampment throughout the day, and to endeavour to obtain incidentally from them whatever information he could as to a white man having passed through, or stayed in their country.

These measures of precaution having been put in force, we set ourselves to wait. It was clear to us that Munza would communicate with us in some way or other during the evening; a black man cannot wait, and he never puts anything off until to-morrow, except, indeed, his work.

As we anticipated, about an hour after our return to our encampment, we saw, coming towards us as fast as his legs could carry him, one of the King's couriers or runners—the same, in fact, who, on the previous evening, as we were on our way to the public reception, had brought us Munza's greeting. To the functions of courier he evidently added those of ambassador or master of the ceremonies, and we received him with all the honours due to his exalted rank; that is to say, we permitted him to enter our enclosure and come to the hut where we were all assembled together, with our interpreter beside us.

Munza sent word to say that he could not un-

derstand why we had not allowed our sister to enter the palace unaccompanied. Had not he himself, that very morning, permitted his wives to visit us unattended?

We replied that every country had its own peculiar customs; we respected those of the Monbuttoos, but we could not depart from our own. In the mighty country where we were born, a woman never entered alone into the house of any man, unless he happened to be her father, her brother, or her husband.

This reply had no sooner been translated, than the courier departed as speedily as he had come.

Half an hour afterwards we saw him returning. Munza had decided upon his course of action, and sent it to us by word of mouth, just as we should convey our ideas by means of a letter or a despatch.

This time the ambassador was enjoined to tell us that his master wished to receive our sister in private, because the chief of the white men had, on the previous evening, stated that she did not wish to explain publicly the motive of her journey.

We replied in the following terms :—

"Our sister could not, indeed, speak before the whole court, but there is nothing to prevent her explaining herself in the presence of her brothers, who are aware of her secret, as the King cannot fail to suppose."

The end had not come yet. For the third time, the master of the ceremonies appeared, and informed us that the King consented to receive us all and that he was awaiting our visit.

We had foreseen some such message, feeling sure that Munza, whatever might be his motive, would not show his teeth, if such a vulgar expression may be used in connection with so powerful a monarch. But, in our own interest, and to retain our reputation as white men and important personages, we were determined to stand on our dignity.

The courier was therefore commissioned to convey to Munza, as literally as possible, the following message :—

"The King having refused the white people the *entrée* into his palace, the latter cannot, after such an affront, present themselves immediately before him. But they are prepared to receive him as worthily as it is in their power to do, if he will condescend to pay them a visit."

The desultory conversation was at an end, and the evening and night passed off without any other incident. We thought it prudent, however, to place a strong guard round the camp, and, as we had been in the habit of doing for some time past, Delange, de Morin, and I divided the night between us, keeping watch and watch, as they do on board ship.

On the following day we were reassured on the score of the King's intentions towards us.

Provisions, in large quantities, were sent to us, as on the previous evening. Munza either bore us no grudge, or, if he did, it was to his own interest to conceal it.

Towards eight o'clock there was a great stir around our camp, the palisading being thronged with a circle of natives, and we were apprised that the ruler of the Monbuttoos was preparing to pay us a visit.

Very soon the drums, trumpets, and horns began their customary din, shouts rent the air, and the King appeared in the midst of a numerous escort, who displayed great brutality in keeping at a distance such of his subjects as pressed upon him too closely.

De Morin, without delay, made our soldiers and the greater portion of the bearers fall in, and, after having issued his orders, rejoined us in our hut, the largest of all, where we firmly awaited the arrival of his Majesty of Monbuttoo.

We imagined that he intended entering our enclosure accompanied by his officers. Nothing of the sort—he ordered them to remain without, and alone, unarmed, calm, and with head erect, just as he had appeared to us at our first interview, he advanced up the centre of the path which we had made from the palisade to our hut. Our soldiers, who had been taught by de Morin a sort of drill in epitome, presented arms, whilst three Nubians, who acted as our

drummers, beat the roll they had learnt under my instruction.

Above our hut floated the French Standard. We thought that, under the circumstances, we might fairly hoist it, and our beloved national ensign, which we had not seen for so long a time, made our hearts beat high. I am not quite sure that some of our eyes did not fill with tears at the sight of that bit of bunting waving in the air, and saluting us in the name of our country. Out of respect to the birth-place and earliest recollections of Madame de Guéran, as well as by way of consulting the prejudices of Miss Poles, the British flag was hoisted by the side of our own, but Delange, who was in charge of the decoration department, arranged matters so that our flag completely enveloped that of Great Britain. When so far away from home, and free from all danger of wounding any susceptibilities, one may be held excused for giving the highest place to the flag of one's own country.

The African monarch, on reaching the hut, was received by Delange, who held out his hand and begged him to enter our dwelling.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

In truth, if Munza is the greatest potentatein these regions, he is also the most civilized of savages. He seated himself on a bench, and, without displaying any excessive curiosity, glanced at the various objects displayed for the purpose of attracting his attention and affording him pleasure. As soon as his eyes fell on a watch, a compass, a telescope, or, in fact, any one of the things laid out for his inspection, Delange took it up, and, approaching the King, endeavoured, through the medium of Nassar, to explain to him its mechanism, and make him understand its use. Nevertheless, we were bound to confess that he listened to our interpreter with a very absent air; his glances, instead of being devoted to things, were directed more than perhaps they ought to have been, towards persons, and it was very evident that Madame de Guéran was the object in view. Sufficiently master of himself to avoid looking at her too fixedly, he never ceased to cast, as on the previous evening, rapid and side-long glances at her.

There is no shutting one's eyes to the fact

that the beauty of our fair companion has made a deep impression on Munza. In spite of his savage nature, he is certainly by instinct, if not by innate sentiment, alive to the charm of beauty.

He understands that her face, her hair, her hands, and her figure are superior to all his surroundings, and to all that he has ever seen. He is lost in wonder, he is under a charm, and if he dared, and were not restrained by his pride, this pagan would prostrate himself before this new idol.

All this, I need scarcely say, makes us very uneasy, for what would become of us if Munza were to entertain a serious passion for our beloved Sultana?

The situation is by no means new; on the contrary, it is historical, as the following adventure which befell Baker, and which I will endeavour to recall, will show.

That traveller was at a few days' journey from Lake Albert, in the midst of a black tribe ruled over by the chief Kamrasi. Lady Baker, prostrated by fever, was most anxious to go on for the purpose of reaching a more healthy district.

Baker, for his part, thought that he was on the eve of attaining the end towards which he had been struggling for so long—a few steps more, a few additional efforts, and the source of the Nile, as far as his ideas went, would be discovered.

But Kamrasi took no heed of the fever which was consuming the wife, nor of the scientific enthusiasm of the husband. In spite of his promises and his engagements, he persisted in keeping Lady Baker and her husband in his kingdom, and refused them the bearers necessary for the prosecution of their journey. At length, one day, when Baker was urging him to assist them, Kamrasi said—

"I will let you leave me on the sole condition that you leave your wife with me."

The English explorer, in a rage, presented a pistol at the breast of the negro king, who merely replied—

"Why are you angry? What wrong have I done you in asking for your wife? I would give you one of mine with pleasure if you wished it, and I never thought you would hesitate about giving yours up. As a rule, I offer pretty wives to all who come to see me, and it appeared to me to be a very simple matter to make an exchange with you. Do not bear me any ill-will; if my proposition displeases you, I will not renew it."

He kept his word; but Kamrasi was a very amiable native, of a much more facile temperament than the terrible King of the Monbuttoos.

We may, therefore, find ourselves in a very embarrassing, if not perilous, position, should, as we begin to think, this African despot, with his ardent passions, accustomed to satisfy his every

whim and fancy, be attracted by the first white woman he has ever seen, and the loveliest creature he has ever dreamt of.

The question before us, however, was how best to entertain our guest, to excite his curiosity, and rouse him when he showed any sign of forgetting himself in the contemplation of Madame de Guéran.

De Morin had at first recourse to lucifer matches; when he thought that the King was becoming too deeply absorbed he took out of his pocket his silver fusee-box and lighted a match. But the operation, which had served us in good stead amongst other tribes, very soon palled upon Munza.

From matches we passed to refreshments; a bottle of champagne, the solitary remnant of Parisian luxuries, was produced and opened in honour of the King.

The noise, the popping of the cork, the outflow of the froth, and the sparkling of the wine produced a certain amount of impression on him; but it did not last long, and, with an astonishing genius for imitation, he, without the least awkwardness, clinked against our cups the silver goblet we had presented to him, and he drank as he saw us doing.

Then de Morin, bent upon using every possible means to engage his attention, took down his fowling-piece, and aiming at a splendid

parrot which was sitting in a neighbouring palm-tree, brought it to the ground.

The King, on hearing the report, very naturally sprang up, but he speedily recovered his composure, and, as his frightened subjects were shouting in alarm and rushing towards our palisade, he hastened out to reassure them and tell them to be quiet.

When he rejoined us, our flags, waving in the wind, attracted his attention, and, after looking at them for a moment, he called Nassar, and said—

"What is the use of those things?"

Nassar, prompted by us, explained that they were flags, and that each nation had a different one.

"Then," said Munza, "you do not belong to the same nation as the other white man did? His flag was not like these."

We endeavoured to make him understand that the territory peopled by white men was of immense extent, and divided into several kingdoms, Schweinfurth having come from the east and we from the west.

Delange, taking advantage of the opportunity, told Munza that he ought to have known our flag, seeing that he had already received at his court a man belonging to the same nation as ourselves.

"No, I have never seen but one man, the

leaf-eater," was the reply, "and he had not a flag like these."

The Monbuttoos had nick-named Schweinfurth the leaf-eater, because, as a botanist, he had spent his leisure moments in making a collection of rare plants, which, they assumed, were eaten by him.

Notwithstanding his evident wish to remain with us longer, Munza's pride induced him to bring his visit to a close. He left us, after taking a long, stealthy look at Madame de Guéran.

Our escort again presented arms, and our drummers, adding their uproar to that made by the trumpets of the Monbuttoos, allowed him to make, in theatrical parlance, an effective exit.

The information collected by Nassar soon convinced us that the King had spoken in all good faith when he said that he had not received any white man at his court subsequently to the visit paid him by Schweinfurth.

As our interpreter had imagined, the Baron de Guéran must have passed through Munza's dominions without stopping, so as to reach without delay the province governed by Degberra.

In this latter district alone, therefore, can we get any reliable information. But how are we to get there without the consent of the King? How, even, ask at once for that permission, with-

out displeasing our host, who heaps favours upon us and condescends to visit us?

Alas, these visits, which are day by day becoming more frequent, convince us, to our great sorrow, that the African monarch has really fallen in love with our dear companion, and will certainly not allow us to depart.

We had never calculated, I confess, upon complications of this sort; we had reckoned on the natural difficulties of our route, on possible attacks by the natives, the desertion of our escort, fatigue, sickness, discouragement, hunger—we had admitted to ourselves that any or all these obstacles might, perhaps, stand in the way of our success; but it had never entered into our heads to suppose that the love of an African sovereign for our beloved Sultana would bar our onward progress.

We had, as we thought, foreseen everything, and had made all due allowance for accidents of all kinds, whether provoked by the hostility of the elements or of man, and for all obstacles proceeding from Nature herself, ever ready to say to the over-bold—"Thus far, and no further;" but we had never taken into consideration those human passions which, nevertheless, spring into being and burst forth under the burning skies of Africa just as radiantly as they do in our own more temperate clime.

A thousand and one rumours confirmed our suspicions, and heightened our fears. Munza,

according to common report, was no longer the somewhat indolent sovereign, passing his life in the contemplation of his treasures, in compelling the admiration of his subjects, dressing himself up in fantastic costumes, and dancing before his court.

He now made preparations for war on a large scale, collecting and stowing away in his armoury weapons of all kinds, his temper was becoming uncertain, he was restless, and occasionally gave way to violent paroxysms of rage.

How will all this end? None of us dare hazard even a guess.

June 20.—I fear that Miss Poles has been up to her little pranks again. Just as I sat down to write Nassar hurried to me, begging me to go to her assistance as quickly as possible.

CHAPTER XXXV.

FROM MISS BEATRICE POLES TO MISS EMILY ——

"THESE lines, my dear Emily, will, in all probability, never reach you. It is even very likely that after I have written them I shall destroy them. But I must talk to you; I cannot help myself. My heart is overflowing, and I must turn the stream of its confidence towards you. In whom can I confide, if not in you? Who amongst my travelling companions deserves to be my confidant? MM. Périères, de Morin, and Delange are out of the question. I have no right to inflict such pain, so bitter an awakening on them, nor to deprive them in an instant of their cherished illusions. I cannot say brusquely to them—'I have made a mistake, gentlemen; I do not love you.'

"As for Madame de Guéran—you know very well, my dear Emily, that to repose confidence in a rival may be dangerous.

"So, in my isolation, I turn to you, and begin. We are at this moment in the country of the Monbuttoos, at the court of King Munza, a man about thirty-five years of age, in the full bloom and vigour of manhood. He is tall, his

figure is good, and his splendid features recall the fine old statues of the monarchs of ancient Ethiopia. He is not a negro—do not labour under that delusion—he is a dusky white man —a very handsome man, too, artistically dressed and with a majestic mien. Moreover, he is a man of intelligence, and a very powerful sovereign into the bargain.

"Nevertheless, Munza, who seems to think of nothing but our comfort, and with whom we are on the best possible terms, absolutely refuses to allow us to leave his dominions. What is his reason for that? you will ask. A very simple one. The King, who, up to this time, has never seen any women but his hideous Monbuttoo specimens, destitute of grace and costume alike, no sooner set eyes on two white women, young, agreeable, well made, and good looking, than he fell in love with one of them. Although a savage, he has a heart which is quite as warm as one born in Europe; nay, warmer, perhaps, on account of the climate.

"But again, you will ask, which of the two white women is the chosen one? To whom, to Madame de Guéran or to me, has this handsome Paris awarded the apple? The question is a very natural one, and the answer to it involves a point on which we here are very much divided.

"MM. Delange, de Morin, and Périères, who have been in love with me for some time past,

as you know, are naturally anxious that Munza should not enter the lists against them. Consequently, they persist, in all honesty, in treating me as out of the question altogether, and maintaining that the eyes of the King turn towards the Baroness, that all his sighs are for her.

"I know, my dear Emily, exactly what you are going to say—that, though a mistake might be made about the object of a sigh, there can be none about the direction of a look. And then you proceed to enquire towards whom Munza's glances turn?

"Madame de Guéran, my dear friend. I cannot pretend that it is not so, and I owe you the truth at all events. I owe it to myself as well, for these lines will, in all probability, never reach you, but are destined to comfort my own heart alone.

"But do you remember that charming comedy, *le Chandelier*, written by a French author, Alfred de Musset? If you do, you will have guessed the drift of what I have already written. The King, with his remarkable shrewdness, and a delicacy very rare amongst the negroes, is diverting all suspicion, and, in order not to compromise me, allows it to be thought that he is in love with Madame de Guéran. Nothing could be more natural.

"Such is the position of affairs—the most powerful King in all Africa is in love with your dearest friend. It was bound to happen sooner

or later, and I was quite prepared for it. But I did not anticipate that things would come to such a pitch that he wishes, not only to keep me near him, but my companions also, as well as our escort and bearers.

"Now, have I any right to impede the progress of the caravan, to postpone M. de Guéran's rescue, if he is a prisoner, or to leave any longer in obscurity certain geographical points which our journey towards the south will certainly clear up?

"I do not think so, and, seeing that I am now only annoying, embarrassing, and compromising everybody, I ought to put myself on one side altogether, and sacrifice myself for the public good. I will seek out the King, and will say to him, 'Sire, you ought not to mix my affairs up with those of my friends; if I have done wrong in pleasing you, you should not hold others responsible for my fault. Do not keep them any longer in your dominions; matters of importance compel them to proceed southwards. But, since you do not wish to separate yourself from me, let my destiny be accomplished! I will be your prisoner, your slave, and one day I will be your wife, if some Protestant minister, who may perchance be passing through this country, will only bless our union.'

"Yes, my dear Emily, thus will I speak to him, and he cannot help being touched by my words, or avoid setting my friends at liberty.

But I think I hear you exclaim, 'and you, my poor Beatrice, what will become of you in the midst of the eighty legitimate wives of this monarch, to say nothing of his three or four hundred less lawful spouses?'

On that head do not at all be uneasy. I will soon bring them to reason, and, moreover, the King, since he has loved me, has banished them from his presence, if, indeed, he has not taken leave of them altogether. I shall soon reign with undisputed sway in Munza's heart. I have a noble mission to fulfil by the side of this man, a savage now, but in the future to be civilized by my love. He will blush for his past life, and for the ignorance and sloth he has permitted amongst his subjects. I trust that before another year has passed away he will have earned the title of Munza the Beloved, the father of his people, and that he will have founded in his kingdom many useful institutions. Possibly I may even prevail upon him to renounce his absolute power, and establish Constitutional Government and a parliament!

"In all this I have said nothing about my own feelings, and you will naturally be anxious to know if I, with my delicate and refined tastes, can ever attach myself altogether to this being, exceptional undoubtedly, but, nevertheless, uncultivated and with habits totally opposed to my own?

"I quite recognize the justice of your

anxiety, but I will allay it by a word—I love him already!

"Yes, I have no hesitation in confessing it to myself—his appearance, his position—why should I keep that in the background?—the respect paid to him by all, the almost worship of which he is the object, have all made a singular impression on me. Is our love ever entirely free from vanity? Lastly, his great love moved me—how could it have been otherwise?

"Do not be hard upon your friend, nor reproach her with inconstancy. Spare me your reproaches, and do not ever mention the names of MM. de Morin, Périères, and Delange. I really did imagine myself in love with them one after the other, but, good heavens! what a mistake I made! I never felt for them as I feel now! And how far, how very far, are these more or less fair haired, blue-eyed, ordinary men, removed from—my Munza!

"And, besides, there were three of them; I had only to choose—the very reason, perhaps, why I did nothing of the kind. Yes, my thoughts were always floating from one to the other; I was irresolute, going first to this and then to that one, without coming to any decision. If I could have said to myself—this is the one you love; he is superior to both the others—the matter would have been at an end; I should have been his for life, and should have passed Munza without seeing him. But

these gentlemen are too good, they are too much alike, and their very perfections, which I have ever been ready to acknowledge, throw me into a terrible state of embarrassment. To-day I am at all events freed from that. And, yet, that is not quite true. I have just written out on paper a short speech intended for Munza, but how can I repeat by word of mouth what I have written for you? He knows a few words of Arabic, which he once heard from Aboo-Sammit, and, thanks to my prodigious facility for languages, I have picked up the Monbuttoo dialect to a certain extent. But the nervous state I shall be in when I am with him, and his agitation, will both combine to prevent our expressing ourselves clearly. I am afraid I cannot take an interpreter with me, for there are occasions in one's life when an interpreter would be anything but an assistance.

"In the general interest, and for the sake of my own peace of mind, I must speak to the King as soon as possible; but, alas! I do not know even how to get to him. Courage! I will see him to-night. I must see him to-night. As soon as everybody around me has retired to rest, I will make my way towards the Palace, and, then—then I will trust to fortune.

"I leave you, my dear Emily, for I must go and dress—not from any feeling of vanity; Munza and I are far beyond that, but out of deference to his Royal Majesty."

CHAPTER XXXVI.

"As I recorded yesterday, Miss Poles was in a regular mess when Nassar came to fetch me. It was only this morning that I learned what had happened, and I am using these loose sheets for my narrative, because the doings and sayings of our English companion are really so eccentric that I am obliged to put our journal on one side.

Last night Miss Poles, snatched by Nassar and myself from imminent danger, was too excited even to reply to the questions of her saviours. Without saying a word, she rushed precipitately into her tent, and this morning she has not made her appearance. I have been, in consequence, reduced to appeal to our interpreters for information, and they very soon put me *au courant* with the situation. The blacks know all that takes place amongst their neighbours, and they know it the more easily, because of all doors and windows, where there are any, being left open on account of the heat. The King's residence, being less open to inquisitive eyes than any other buildings, excites all the more curiosity, and every eye is persistently

fixed on it. The numerous officers who live in it, the servants of all classes, and the crowds of idle women gabble and chatter, and carry all the court news into the village.

Last night, then, about nine o'clock, Miss Poles, dressed up to the nines, and bedizened like a shrine, but closely veiled—Miss Poles, I say, escaping from our encampment, must needs betake herself to the Palace, where, after managing to effect an entrance, she demanded a private audience of the King.

Munza, in all probability, was considerably disappointed when he saw her enter his room, where, reclining on his mats, he was smoking his long pipe in solitude and in a reverie. He had been told that a white woman desired to see him, and, for a moment, he might have indulged in a hope that it was not Miss Poles.

When she appeared in all her angular leanness before this African, himself a very near neighbour of a tribe which is so in love with *embonpoint* as to fatten its women as we do our beasts, he must have experienced a certain shock especially when she raised her long arms and removed her veil, as much as to say, "Look and admire." The unhappy man, who, a moment before, had been no doubt dwelling on another image, gave way to silent rage.

She then, without hesitation or ceremony, was daring enough to sit down beside him and address him at great length. What did she

say? Nobody knows positively, because at first the *tête-à-tête* was conducted quietly, but we can draw our own conclusions from what transpired subsequently.

Munza, driven, no doubt, to desperation, suddenly sprang to his feet in a paroxysm of rage and clapped his hands to summon his officers, ever ready to assist him in case of emergency. These appeared at once, the King said a few words to them in a low tone, and, ten minutes afterwards, in walked all the royal wives, Miss Poles, meanwhile, expecting every moment that the King would fall on his knees at her feet.

As soon as ever the women were assembled, the King, pointing to Miss Beatrice, said to them—

"This white woman has the impertinence to propose living here in this Palace, and taking your place by my side. Do what you like to her, I hand her over to you."

He disappeared, leaving our Englishwoman to fight it out with his eighty wives.

The scene which followed may easily be imagined. The women looked at each other, hesitating, still undecided, and altogether nonplussed. If their master had not been their informant they would not have believed their ears! This extraordinary looking creature, the jest and by-word of the harem ever since the day of the presentation, this woman, by

herself, to pretend to oust them all, to supplant them, to monopolize their beloved Munza, their idol, and their God!

By degrees their anger rose, their eyes flashed, from eighty mouths flowed simultaneous torrents of abuse in the Monbuttoo tongue, and a perfect shower of invective fell like hail upon the unfortunate Englishwoman. She was powerless to reply, her presence of mind had deserted her; upright and motionless, she might have been taken for a lifeless image of resignation and grief.

To insults succeeded open menace, each urged on her neighbour, the timid ones took example by their bolder sisters, the most self-possessed became furious, and at last the whole band of furies advanced against Miss Poles, bent upon tearing her to pieces. The sense of her danger brought back her wonted coolness and bravery, and extricated her from her very ludicrous fix. She pulled her famous revolver out of her pocket, and thus keeping at bay her nearest enemies, she gained an outlet and took to flight.

The women pursued her with frenzied cries of rage, but none of these termagants, fed, well fed, in the seraglio, and weighed down by fat, could struggle at all successfully against the long legs and feet of Miss Poles. They would never have caught her up, if she had been able to get inside our doors without knocking.

Alas! our only door was shut, and Miss Beatrice soon found herself, like a stag at bay, obliged to put her back against the palisading, and face the pack of women who had, by means of this *contretemps*, come up with her. In spite of the firm stand she made, she would assuredly have been hurled to the ground, trodden under foot, eaten perhaps, if Nassar had not roused me to open the door, rescue our companion, and put to flight the furies let loose upon her.

As soon as Miss Beatrice's escapade was recounted to us in all its details, Madame de Guéran, Delange, and I could not help laughing. De Morin alone, instead of joining in our mirth, declared that, by virtue of the powers we had given him, he intended to administer a sharp reprimand to the culprit, and to forbid her for the future to take any step not previously authorized by us.

"Leave her alone," said Delange, "her discomfiture is punishment enough, without your humiliating her still more with your sermonizing."

"Her discomfiture!" exclaimed de Morin, "you are very much mistaken if you think that she will suffer from it. She is sure to attribute Munza's conduct to quite another cause than contempt for herself. She is, you may be sure, fully persuaded that he did not understand her, and that he would have knelt at her feet if she could have expressed herself

more clearly. You do not know her as well as I do. I have the greatest respect for her many good qualities, but on the score of feminine fatuity, she is the most complete specimen that a man could wish to see. Intelligent, wise in counsel, and with plenty of common sense where others are concerned and her own ridiculous conceit is not called into play, she loses her head entirely occasionally."

"You are right," said I, "and you do well, I admit, to put us on our guard against her. But her last escapade is not of very great importance, and if I were in your place—"

De Morin interrupted me by exclaiming excitedly.

"I do not understand, my dear Périères, how you can possibly take this view of the matter. The events of to-night, you may rely upon it, will exercise a great influence over our future. Miss Poles, notwithstanding her follies and absurdities, is none the less a white woman, and a member of our caravan. She is always to be seen with us; she is known as our companion and our friend, if not our equal. The conduct of Munza and his wives does not affect Miss Poles alone, it affects us and lowers the *prestige* which we enjoy. From this moment the Monbuttoos know that we may be insulted and threatened, and that, at all events, they are at liberty to attempt to maltreat us. Yesterday we were, in the eyes of this tribe, privileged

people, surrounded by a sort of halo ; to-day we are on a par with the rest of the world."

" It is true," said I, " and I am surprised, in truth, that it should have escaped me."

" If that were all," resumed de Morin, " I should not despair, for we know very well how to take care of ourselves. But this escapade, I fear, will involve us in a serious dilemma."

" I do not understand you," said Madame de Guéran, " pray explain what you mean."

" The explanation is very simple," continued de Morin. " You, Madame de Guéran, were, especially as a white woman, a being apart, as far as Munza was concerned—a being whom he allowed himself to love—unfortunately we cannot have any doubt about that, but one whom he loved at a distance, without daring to speak. The extraordinary and grotesque declaration, apparently made to him by your female companion, has certainly lessened the distance which, in his mind, separated him from us. He gave way to a wish, but he could not entertain any hope ; you were in his eyes veiled in a species of cloud ; you were surrounded by a halo of light, and placed on an eminence believed by him to be inaccessible. Miss Poles, unfortunately, has taught him that white women can descend from such eminences, can bring themselves down to the level of negro kings, and that he can, if he so wish, treat them no longer as goddesses, but as

ordinary mortals. I shall consequently, be very much astonished if his reserve, which was our safeguard, does not vanish."

June 25.—De Morin was right. The King, who for two days past has not shown us any signs of his existence nor paid us a visit, has, after, probably, reflecting upon and maturing his designs, just sent his courier, ambassador, or master of the ceremonies, whatever his title may be, to us. This functionary, in order that his mission may appear more important, is accompanied by a numerous escort of officers and soldiers, and, above all, musicians.

Roused by the noise, curious to know the meaning of it, and not without a feeling of uneasiness, we left our huts, made our men fall in, and received this formal deputation with all the solemnity possible.

The envoy steps to the front and speaks, Nassar interprets, and we learn that the sovereign of the Monbuttoos demands the hand of our sister in marriage.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

We are really alarmed. The demand has its ludicrous aspect, but, preferred by Munza, whose character we know, it is formidable as well. How are we to decline the honour he thinks he is doing us, without wounding beyond redress his pride both as a man and a king?

Suppose that, to gain time, we reply that his proposition cannot be accepted without some consideration; suppose we allow him to hope, and our position becomes thereby more dangerous? De Morin is averse from this, and is of opinion that we should appear scandalized, without, at the same time, wounding the King's vanity. We agree with that view of the case, and send word to Munza that he is insulting our sister by asking her to share the lot of his numerous wives.

What impression will these words produce on the King? He is not the man to take matters quietly and acknowledge himself beaten. He is on the point of sending us another message and we are in terrible anxiety.

No, this time he leaves off talking, and acts.

Ten soldiers, carrying the huge drums,

already described, which throughout Africa are used to summon the people to hear the orders of their chiefs or kings, left the palace and proceeded in various directions through the village, one of them performing his allotted task at a short distance from our encampment. The Monbuttoos quickly responded to the summons, formed themselves into a large circle, and immediately afterwards cries of joy resounded from all sides.

Nassar, who mingled with the crowd, came running to us with the news that the King had invited his subjects to the palace, where he was going to distribute amongst them a large number of his wives.

This was Munza's way of replying to us. At one fell swoop he was getting rid of his whole harem, and offering it to his subjects in order that he might afterwards be able to say to us, "I have no longer a wife, nothing now stands in the way of your giving me your sister." He could not have hit upon a more ingenious device, nor have placed us in a greater difficulty, but our dismay was mingled with a feeling of pity for all these creatures, who, from the palace, were descending to cabins, and were being converted from royal wives into simple villagers.

Horror! a fresh piece of intelligence, far more serious, has reached us. In the distribution about to be made, the mothers-in-law

and sisters-in-law of Munza, the wives whom, according to the customs of the country, he has inherited, are alone included. As for the eighty wives, whose acquaintance we have made, and who, after having belonged to Munza, cannot become the property of his subjects, they are to be beheaded. This is the way in which the potentates of Africa settle their burning questions, heads and difficulties being got rid of together.

Shall we allow Munza to give Madame de Guéran so startling a proof of his love? Shall we stand by as passive spectators of the bloody sacrifice, the gigantic hecatomb he purposes to accomplish? We do not dream of any such thing; every consideration impels us to save these unfortunate creatures, whom one word from us, one unlucky message has condemned to death.

But what are we to say to the King? If we ask for mercy for his wives he will not fail to reply in his usual logical style—

"Their number does not frighten your sister, and she consents to live in my harem?"

Yes, that is sure to be his answer. And, on the other hand, if he kills his wives, will he not be in a position to say—

"The motive you alleged as the ground for refusing my request has now disappeared, and, therefore, you cannot help complying with it."

It is impossible to find a way out of this

difficulty, and whilst we are discussing it, the massacre is, in all probability, commencing.

On, then, to the palace, without further delay!

Twenty of our escort, selected by Nassar, were told off to accompany us.

Delange and I seized our most trustworthy pistols and surest rifles. De Morin alone was almost unarmed.

When we were expressing our astonishment at this, he interrupted us by saying, with considerable excitement—

"All that I foresaw has come to pass. Our position is as serious as it can well be—but I can save you. Do not question me, do not ask me for any information, for I have no time to answer you. Give me full power, and I will turn this idiotic love of Munza's to our own advantage. Before three days have passed away you shall leave this country. You shall march towards the south, and, for the last part of the journey, you shall have at your disposal resources of which you never dreamt."

What did he mean? How are we to leave this country? What idea has come to him thus suddenly?

Whilst Delange and I looked at him with amazement, Madame de Guéran, ever prompt and resolute in the hour of danger, held out her hand to de Morin, and said to him—

"Do what you will. As far as I am con-

cerned, I approve of it beforehand, and, if you fail, no reproach of any kind shall ever pass my lips."

"Thanks," said de Morin, "a thousand thanks."

Then, turning towards us, he asked us whether we ratified the approval already expressed by Madame de Guéran.

"Can you doubt it?" said I.

"You have an idea," said Delange in his turn, "and we have none. Consequently, we cannot prefer our opinion to yours, and I give you *carte blanche*, my dear fellow."

"To the palace!" exclaimed de Morin.

We mounted our horses, and set off at full gallop, our escort following in our wake.

Madame de Guéran remained in camp, under the protection of the Arab interpreters and a few soldiers.

Miss Poles, whose self-respect, whatever de Morin may say, has received a serious blow, and who is still disheartened, has taken refuge in her tent. The idea has not occurred to her to rush to the succour of the eighty wives who, three days ago, were anxious to tear her in pieces.

Five minutes sufficed to bring us to the palace. Not a single soldier attempted to stop us; we were recognized as friends of the King, and, moreover, we brooked no delay.

We alighted in front of Munza's residence,

and requested to see the King. He at once gave orders for us to be admitted to his own room, and he eagerly came forward to meet us.

"The white men consent at last," said he, with a smile, "to visit me."

"Yes," replied de Morin, "we have a communication to make to you with regard to our sister. Will you hear us?"

"I will."

"We have just been informed that you intend to give her a proof of your love by sacrificing your harem. Is that so?"

"Yes," said the King. "Three hundred women have already left the palace, and will not return any more. As for the rest," he added, very calmly, "I have condemned them to death."

Delange and I shuddered. But de Morin, without a tremor, still pursuing his own idea alone, asked the King when they were to die.

"In an hour," said Munza. "The executioners are getting ready now."

We breathed again; we were in time.

The King took our friend by the hand and led him towards an adjoining apartment, and we followed him.

In a corner of this room, on a species of daïs, were displayed massive copper salvers, the pride of the Monbuttoos. Munza pointed to them and, with the utmost coolness said—

"This evening each of those salvers will hold

a head, and I shall send them all to the Sultana, your sister, so that she may see for herself that I have not one wife left."

Nothing could exceed the gallantry of this resolution, nor could any sacrifice, either of himself or other people, have been proposed with a better grace.

Fortunately for the royal wives, we were blind to all this forethought, and bent upon saving them.

"Our sister," resumed de Morin, "has commissioned us to ask you to spare the lives of these women."

"She is not jealous of them, then?" asked the King, turning pale.

De Morin, who appeared to read Munza's heart as if it were a book, hastened to reply—

"She is jealous of your harem, but not of these creatures. So long as they do not belong to you, nothing further is needed."

The King smiled once more; but he remarked to our interpreter that he could not get rid of these women in any other way than by putting them to death, the law enacting that the wives of a reigning sovereign could not under any circumstances become the property of his subjects.

"Your subjects!" replied de Morin, quickly. "Be it so. But we are not your subjects."

"Do you want me to give you my wives?" asked Munza, in astonishment.

"We want you to give them to our sister as slaves."

"Oh!" exclaimed the King, apparently delighted. "She wants to torture them by way of revenging herself on them?"

"Possibly so," replied de Morin, quietly.

I confess that at this moment neither Delange nor I understood his drift one bit. We imagined that he was compromising Madame de Guéran to too great an extent, and that he had entered into too serious an engagement with Munza; but we had given him full power, and we were bound to let him act as he thought best.

The African King, after having reflected for a moment, said to de Morin—

"I agree. My wives shall not be put to death, and they shall be given to your sister. She may do what she likes with them, and I will burn all their houses—I will not have any harem. That is her wish, is it not?"

"Quite so," said our friend, who now, in his turn, waited for Munza to state his intentions and unfold his plans.

The King hesitated. The tyrant, the despot without pity or remorse, was as a child in all that concerned the woman he loved.

"When," he asked at length, "will your sister deign to take up her abode in my palace, and the place of all those whom I have just given to her?

"As soon as she can obtain the consent of her father," replied de Morin, unhesitatingly.

Delange and I exchanged despairing glances. Our friend had evidently lost his head. Munza was quite as much astonished as we were; but in his case amazement and anger were blended.

"Your father is not with you," said he; "and, therefore, his consent cannot be obtained."

"In that case our sister cannot marry you," replied de Morin. "She is bound to respect the custom of her own country, and, as far as that goes, this custom prevails amongst all the tribes we came across before reaching the Monbuttoos. To gain the daughter, is it not always necessary to apply to the father?"

"And how am I to apply to yours?" exclaimed Munza, becoming furious. "He is far, far away in your country, and I cannot get at him."

"If he were far away," replied de Morin, in the same quiet tone that he had used throughout the interview, "I should not have mentioned him. But our father has not been in our country for a long time; he is now a prisoner in a kingdom close to yours, towards the south."

Munza scanned de Morin closely, seeking to read his very eyes and discover the truth there.

Delange and I breathed more freely, and we

began to have a vague notion of our friend's project. As he had said, he wanted, in the common interest, to take advantage of the King's love ; he was bent upon making Munza help us to find M. de Guéran, and, instead of describing him as the husband of our companion—which would have been dangerous both for her and for us—he passed him off as her father.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

After having scanned de Morin attentively for some time, the King suddenly said to him—

"How is it that your father has not been mentioned before to-day? Why did you not let me know sooner what was the real object of your journey?"

"I wanted to tell you long ago," replied our friend. "Did I not ask you for a private interview? You acceded to my request, and my sister came with us on the following morning to your palace. If you had received us then, you would have known everything."

"But," remarked Munza, "you have seen me frequently, and might have spoken to me."

"You insulted us, and were no longer our friend. Secrets of such importance as ours are only confided to a friend. If I speak out to-day, it is only because I have forgiven you since you asked for my sister's hand."

Munza was at a loss for an answer. He, however, did not seem satisfied.

"How," said he, after a pause, "can your father be living southward of my kingdom? Where has he come from?"

"From the same country as ourselves, and he came along the same road that we did."

"In that case, in order to reach the south, he must have passed through my territory?"

"So he did."

"Impossible. He would have come to the palace, where I receive all strangers."

"He remembered that you had prevented Schweinfurth continuing his journey, and consequently, instead of stopping here, he went on in the direction of the province governed by your brother, Degberra."

"And did Degberra know him?"

"Undoubtedly," replied de Morin, boldly. "Either Degberra or his subjects. You can send couriers to your brother, and you will soon know that what I say is true. Question, if you like, the man who is our interpreter, and whom you have already recognized as having been with Schweinfurth. He will tell you that, when he was left by your friend, Aboo-Sammit, in a seriba, situated to the south-east of this place, he entertained our father."

Munza entered into conversation with Nassar for a few moments, and, then, turning towards us, he asked—

"You wish to go to Degberra?"

"Yes," replied de Morin. "We wish to go to him, first of all, but afterwards farther still, if, as we suppose, our father has reached a more distant kingdom."

"And the Sultana will accompany you?"

"Undoubtedly. Our sister cannot leave us so long as she is not married."

"And do you imagine that I shall let her escape in this way?" exclaimed the King.

"Why not?"

"Because she will never return."

"It is in your power to compel her to return."

"How so, if she is no longer in my dominions?"

"She will always be in your dominions if you accompany her with your powerful army."

"What! you wish—" exclaimed Munza, with flashing eyes.

"I do not wish anything," said de Morin. "I merely point out to you a means of not leaving us, of joining our father with us, and of demanding from him the hand of his daughter. If you do not feel yourself either brave enough, or powerful enough to advance southwards, let us continue our journey; white men do not know what fear is—they are both brave and strong. You have now heard all I have to say in the name of our sister and ourselves. Decide—we are going back to our encampment, there to await a visit or a message from you. Only, remember that your wives belong to our sister. You have no longer any right to dispose of them; you have given them to her, and

a great King like you cannot go back from his word."

We left Munza to his reflections, rejoined our escort, and, a few moments afterwards, entered our enclosure. After the first feeling of surprise had passed away, we, all of us, set to work calmly to consider de Morin's plan, and we could not help coming to the conclusion that, even granting that it would be difficult of realization, and might involve us in terrible straits, it still held out some appreciable advantages. In common justice to our friend we were also bound to confess that he had no choice of means to his end, and that we were this very morning in a position of great difficulty. For some days past we have, all of us, been thoroughly convinced, though we dare not say so out loud, that the King of the Monbuttoos would never allow us either to continue our journey towards the south, or to return by the way we came. His passion for Madame de Guéran was a warrant of imprisonment for us; neither prayers nor persuasion would have any effect upon him, and if we desired our liberty we could only obtain it by force.

We next mustered our little army. Thirty soldiers remained to us, and, amongst the bearers, there were not more than twenty whom we could trust with arms, and that only should the worst come to the worst. Taking ourselves,

Nassar, and the interpreters into our calculations, we could rely upon fifty-five men, well-armed, and capable of holding out for a considerable time against several hundreds of negroes. But, granting that we slaughtered them wholesale, and by means of our long-range rifles, laid all these enemies low, would not more still, and ever increasing hordes, rise up in answer to the summons of their King? Worn out, destitute of ammunition, hopeless, and distressed at so much bloodshed, should we not end by giving up the futile struggle, or succumbing to superior numbers? A handful of Europeans have been known to make head against an entire African tribe, but it would be quite another thing to oppose a regular nation of warriors, commanded by a King, fiery, resolute, and personally interested in obtaining a victory.

Suppose, for the sake of argument, we overcome all these obstacles, and a lucky shot rids us of Munza—suppose all his soldiers take to flight, and our path is open? What then? Would not our little force, diminished enough already, be still further reduced in the course of so terrible a struggle? Should we find in a hostile country, where every man would have some relative to avenge, the means necessary for our onward progress? And, even if we were to reach the district governed by Degberra, would not he oppose us just as his brother had done?

Again, suppose we succeed in forcing our way, as many solitary travellers have done, not through this district, it is true, but through others equally dangerous, suppose we reach our destination, and find M. de Guéran a prisoner amongst the Momvoos, the Akkas, or that other tribe of which the Monbuttoos have occasionally spoken—a tribe governed by a woman, a species of Amazon. Even then, how should we, when weakened and scarcely able to defend ourselves, manage to rescue our fellow countryman? We should share his captivity, and that would be the only result we should achieve.

How entirely, on the other hand, would the situation be changed if Munza should make common cause with us, and accompany us as an ally! We should no longer be merely fifty; we should be two thousand, five thousand, any number, in fact. Our handful of men would become an army led and commanded by Europeans, supported by our escort, and strengthened by the possession of fire-arms. No African tribe could stand against us, and nothing would prevent our reaching the eastern extremity of the continent and the Indian ocean.

It may be objected that the King of the Monbuttoos would not dare to advance more than thirty leagues, a formidable distance in these parts, beyond his frontier. But we do not want him to do more; thirty leagues to the south-east will bring us to the nearest spurs of

the Blue Mountains! Munza's army might leave us then; it would, indeed, be of no further use to us. It would rest with us to cross these mountains, on the other side of which we should come upon the Lake Albert Nyanza, and should we succeed in reaching its farther shore, we should find paths, if not well-worn, at all events marked on the map by Speke, Grant, and Burton.

But, it may be asked, what about Munza? How have you disposed of him? Is he likely to let you quietly pursue your journey, whilst he leads his army back again to his kingdom? Do not forget that you are his prisoners, bound to follow him, and to return with him. In three months your position would be much the same as it is now.

Clearly so, if we could not regain our liberty and get rid of the Monbuttoos; but though that would be a difficult matter now, when the army is backed by the whole nation, it would be very different, however, if that army, instead of being at home and amongst its own countrymen, were occupying a hostile territory. It would be disheartened by fatigue, decimated, possibly, by the battles it had been obliged to fight, and weakened in a hundred other ways. Desperate as we should be, and under a positive necessity to conquer, we should be in a position to fight it under advantageous circumstances. God helping us, we should gain the day.

Another objection might, I admit, be urged against this course of proceeding. We might be asked whether our consciences would not reproach us for waging open warfare against our allies, by whose aid alone we have been enabled to surmount so many obstacles?

Our consciences! Why drag them into the discussion? Are we likely to give way to sentiment in our present position, face to face with an army of cannibals and a negro king who, only a few hours ago, proposed to send us the heads of his eighty wives on copper dishes? Why does he keep us prisoners in his kingdom, and interfere with our plans? Is it not he who is driving us to cunning and artifice? He is the stronger, so we must be the cleverer of the two. Our right to fight against him, and conquer him if we can, is indisputable.

On the question of conscience, we are open to attack in one particular alone. In order to open up a passage towards the south and thereby serve our personal interest, is it right for us to draw after us a whole army, to let it work its will on the way, as is the custom of all African armies, and spread ruin and desolation on all around? But even on this score we are above reproach. The King of the Monbuttoos, as I have already recorded, has for the last fortnight been making preparations for war on a large scale, and every year, at this time, when the rainy season is drawing to a close, he

attacks his neighbours, either north or south. We, therefore, are not altering the course of events in any way, but we may be able to effect some improvement by using our influence over Munza in mitigation of the horrors and carnage of savage warfare.

All these arguments and calculations result in the adoption of the plan proposed by de Morin; but Munza has not yet given his decision, and we consequently do not know whether he will accept or not.

* * * * * *

He has accepted. One glance at the sky sufficed to enlighten us as regards his reply.

Towards nine o'clock the whole night was suddenly lit up, quivering tongues of fire leaped up sky-wards, and made even the stars look pale. The harem was on fire; more than three hundred huts had fallen a prey to the devouring element. In a few moments all the dwellings of Munza's wives had disappeared, and not a trace of them was left behind.

And whilst the people surge to and fro, in admiration of the stupendous conflagration, whilst they clap their hands, and dance, and shout, the drums, ivory horns, and trumpets mingle their harsh sounds with the surrounding din, and officers hurry through the crowd, bearing the news that the King has declared war against the tribes of the south.

The shouts are renewed with redoubled energy, and the crowd chants the national hymn, "Ee Ee, tchupy, tchupy, Ee, Munza, Ee." The horizon is ablaze with light, the fire rages in all its fury and splendour, and the eighty wives of Munza, houseless now, bound two by two, and escorted by soldiers, are led towards our encampment.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

The burning of an entire village, the dispersion of three hundred mothers-in-law and sisters-in-law, and the beheading of eighty wives, are in Munza's eyes insufficient to prove his love. He shows a disposition towards delicate attentions also, and, under the impression that Madame de Guéran might be at a loss how to house her stock of slaves, he has sent to our encampment a host of servants with orders to erect a huge shed.

The idea is a charming one, and bespeaks an excellent heart. Indeed, these poor wretches, robbed since morning of their royal spouse, hurled down suddenly from a lofty position, and threatened with the loss of their heads, could scarcely be left at night without some sheltering roof.

From motives of delicacy, we were not present at their arrival, but we are told that they exhibit neither anger nor humiliation. Fear alone possesses them—fear as to the punishment or torture in reserve for them at the hands of the white woman, to whom they have been presented. Perhaps they dread being

eaten, one after another, by their new mistress, but on this score they may make their minds easy. Madame de Guéran will not push her jealousy to such an extreme as that.

In spite, however, of the downcast air of Munza's wives, we dare not rely too much on their spirit of resignation. It is at all times somewhat dangerous to have as near neighbours a hundred humiliated women, looking upon themselves as victims and eager for revenge. In the east, and especially in Africa, it is prudent to guard against poison, which evicted sultanas would have no hesitation in mixing with the food of their enemies. Consequently, we have resolved to keep the ex-royal wives at a respectful distance, and to establish a certain amount of discipline amongst them. Delange, to whom we have for a long time entrusted the superintendence of our servants of every description, sets about his task in connection with the new arrivals, with all his accustomed zeal.

But Delange, however busy he may be, would still find time hanging heavily on his hands, if he could not, now and then, have a game at piquet, écarté, or baccarat. And so it happened that, no sooner had he made the necessary arrangements for the comfort of our eighty slaves, than a brilliant idea struck him. He had not played cards once during the day, and, as he was the loser on the previous evening, he had, by

virtue of the contract, a right to dispose of his adversary as he pleased.

De Morin, meanwhile, was reclining in front of my hut and chatting with me, casting every now and then an occasional glance at the last dying embers of the conflagration.

"Sorry to disturb you, my dear fellow," said Delange, coming up to us, "but you owe me my revenge for last night."

"My dear doctor," replied de Morin, who had seen the approach of his adversary and expected some such proposal, "I hope I may be allowed to say that you are always taking your revenge, and have been doing so for a long time. You have won back from me more than sixty thousand francs at every game known in Europe and Africa. I do not know whether medicine, botany, geography, and science generally will derive much benefit from our expedition, but I can safely assert that on your return to Paris you will be able to write a very instructive work on the various games of chance in vogue amongst the Africans. You have a wonderful nose for scenting them out, and an equally surprising facility in learning them. The negroes themselves are afraid of you, and decline to play with you any more. 'The white man,' they say, 'is too clever by half, and would win the very shirts from off our backs.' Excuse the word, as unknown in these parts as the garment it designates, but it accurately ex-

presses the idea of your adversaries. In short, if there were a Jockey Club amongst these African tribes, and you were put up for election, you would be blackballed to a dead certainty."

"Have you quite finished your little speech, my dear de Morin?" asked Delange.

"Quite, thank you. Have you one to let off, by way of a change? I shall be delighted to hear it, and, under the supposition that it is the case, pray sit down on this empty box here, the whilom receptacle of our deeply regretted claret. I must apologise for not offering you a cigar; the last of them, like our other luxuries, has vanished. But if this beastly negro tobacco appeals to your taste, do not hesitate to help yourself. It is a delicate piece of attention from the hands of the King of the Monbuttoos."

"My dear fellow," replied Delange, as soon as he could get a word in edgeways, "I will not sit down on this box; it has nails in it, and they have already abstracted a portion of my nether garments. Tailors are scarce in this country, so you must forgive me for being careful of my remaining rags. They are deserting me bit by bit in the most cowardly manner, notwithstanding my affection for them, and I already seem to foresee the hour when I shall have to betake myself to the forest for a covering. As for smoking, I have no time to

indulge in any such luxury; it is eleven o'clock, and we have only sixty minutes in which to play our daily and compulsory game."

"'Still harping on my daughter!' My arguments do not appear to have any effect."

"On the contrary; they have convinced me that we must play on without intermission, seeing that, as you yourself confess, I am in the vein."

"Take care! You lost yesterday."

"Which is precisely the reason why, according to our contract, I now bid you rise and follow me at once."

"Follow you? Where to, in the name of fortune?"

"To the residence of the royal dames."

"Their houses are burning, it is a pretty sight still."

"I am not speaking of that defunct village, now turned into one vast furnace. We are hot enough already without going near the fire. I was alluding to this new shed, beneath which all these ladies await our coming."

"Are they not asleep by this time?"

"They dare not sleep," replied Delange, gravely. "I led them to expect a visit from us."

De Morin had finished his pipe by this time, and, always resigned and true to his word, he followed Delange. I followed suit, for I foresaw some amusement in assisting at a game of cards,

which, considering where it was to take place, promised to be peculiar.

The Monbuttoo ladies, as the doctor had told us, were not asleep, and, as we drew near the shed, we heard a confused, continuous hum of many voices, as if they were complaining of the conduct of their royal spouse, whom they reproached with having treated them without due consideration.

"And we are actually slave-owners!" exclaimed de Morin, as we drew near.

"Delange is, my dear fellow," I replied. "The doctor has become a most inveterate trader, a regular nigger-driver. We shall have to give him up to the Egyptian authorities when we get back."

"You do not mean to drag all these women southwards with us?" asked de Morin.

"I really do not know," replied the doctor, "and you had better give me the benefit of your advice on that point. It would be rather a bore to be followed by such a flock of women, but, at the same time Munza might accuse us of despising his gift."

"The King," I observed, "is persuaded that after a short trip towards the south, he will bring us back to his own territory. He will therefore deem it very natural that we should leave these ladies here in our encampment. They will be supposed to be managing our household affairs during our absence."

We had by this time reached the shed, whence puffs of hot air, and lightning glances from innumerable eyes greeted us. Nevertheless, in spite of their number, these small beacons were powerless to illumine a moonless night.

"How are we going to get inside this human ant-hill?" asked de Morin. "We shall run the risk of being engulfed in it, and, as for playing, that is out of the question. We shall never be able to see our cards."

"Make your mind easy on that score," replied the doctor. "I never forget anything. You shall have plenty of light."

And as he said this he appeared to be feeling for something in his coat pocket.

"Do you mean to say that you have any matches left?" I exclaimed, "I thought we gave our last box to Madame de Guéran yesterday?"

"I have something better than matches," said Delange.

He found what he was looking for, left us for a moment, and, stooping down at a little distance from us, he set light to some small fireworks, which we had packed up amongst our cartridges, in accordance with the suggestions of our predecessors in travel, and as an additional means of amusing the negroes. The fireworks chosen by the doctor were Bengal lights, which, instead of blinding us at first and then going out themselves, were manufactured

to burn for some time and spread around them a many-coloured radiance.

Notwithstanding the softness of this illumination, the women, with a vivid recollection of the conflagration of which they had been the victims, imagined that their new residence was about to be burnt, and they began to tremble in every limb. To fear, however, wonder soon succeeded; the blue and green flames, which, placed in front of them, lit them up in so novel and picturesque a fashion, made them wild with delight. Instead of shrinking away, as they had done at first, they came nearer and nearer, and were soon deeply interested in watching the effect of the various colours on their dark skins.

The organizer of this *fête* placed three stools in the middle of the shed; the first for de Morin, the second for himself, and the third to serve as a card-table. These preparations completed, he motioned his adversary to a seat, and throwing three packs of cards down on the table, he intimated that, exercising his right of choice, he intended to play ordinary bezique, fifteen hundred up.

CHAPTER XL.

The game commenced. The women were, at first, completely absorbed in contemplating the Bengal lights, but by degrees their whole attention became concentrated on the cards and the players, it being difficult to say which excited the greater admiration. De Morin, though naturally interested in the game, could not keep his eyes from wandering over the strange figures around him, rendered still more strange by the novel manner in which they were lit up.

"You have arranged this scene admirably," said de Morin to Delange, as he shuffled the cards.

"Have I not? For that very reason you are bound to lose."

"I think I am. But why do you say, 'for that very reason?' Does your tableau count in the game?"

"Not in the game, but in your mode of playing it. The spectacle I have set before you distracts your attention, and you are sure to make a few mistakes, of which I shall take all due advantage."

"Indeed!" replied de Morin, laughing, "and you, I presume, are superior to all these distractions?"

"Quite so, for the simple reason that I had a rehearsal before you appeared, and, therefore, know exactly what to expect."

"All right. I must be on my guard, and you, I think, will find that you have exposed your hand too soon."

De Morin soon recovered his wonted coolness, and devoted himself to the game, but he had not reckoned on the intense natural curiosity of these ladies. Every moment saw them drawing nearer and nearer to the gamblers, pushing, jostling, elbowing each other, and some of them went so far as to climb the tree-stems which supported the roof of the shed, and from those coigns of vantage surveyed the eccentric game.

At length a few of the women, emboldened by the impunity with which their first advances had been made, stretched out their hands and laid hold of the cards, and they were proceeding to pay a similar compliment, *more Africano*, to de Morin's beard and hair.

"Hands off, ladies, if you please," he exclaimed, but remonstrance would have been of but little avail, had not Delange just at that moment scored the requisite fifteen hundred points, thereby putting an end to the game.

"The next thing," said I, "is to get out,

but how is it to be done? Look at these creatures, they could smother us if they wished. We are only three against their eighty, to say nothing of their being armed with stools."

"That is true," replied Delange, "but it so happens that the fireworks are not over, I have a bouquet in reserve."

So saying, the Doctor, by a vigorous push, cleared a small space in front of him, and, taking out of his pocket a Roman candle, he stuck it in the ground and lighted it.

At the noise and glare of this fresh wonder there was a hurried retreat, which resulted in one tumbling over the other in inextricable confusion, whilst those on the tree stems dropped to the ground like over-ripe fruit.

The way out was now clear, and we were rude enough to take advantage of that circumstance without waiting even to shake hands with the ladies. Nevertheless, they had nothing much to grumble at; a bad beginning of the day had, in their case, made an unexpectedly good ending, and instead of having been beheaded at sunset, as they had been led to expect, they had enjoyed the three-fold pleasure of witnessing the fireworks, seeing us, and learning bezique.

CHAPTER XLI.

THERE is no longer any room for doubt, for, although the King has neither said anything to us, nor sent for us, nor paid us a visit, his subjects are in a state of great excitement—the Monbuttoos are preparing for a long campaign. The market, through which we have just strolled, is even more than usually bustling. Munza's lieutenants lay violent hands on all eatables, which are placed without delay on the shoulders of a whole army of slaves, who incontinently carry them off to the palace. Indeed, we gave way to a momentary fear that we should be left unprovided for, but, as soon as ever the officers saw us, they made way for us with the utmost respect. It is quite clear that we have risen considerably in their opinion. Strangers on whom the King bestows his eighty favourite wives are evidently personages worthy of all consideration, and to use a homely expression, not to be sneezed at. We manage, therefore, to become purchasers on a large scale, a very necessary proceeding, in case we should quarrel with Munza on the way, or his army, as will

probably be the case, should squander its supplies. It is not prudent to rely too much on the forethought of people who, if provisions in the ordinary style fail them, have always a delicacy in the shape of human flesh to fall back upon.

When we reached our encampment again, we commenced to make our preparations as if we were destined to set out on the following day. In Africa a war intended is a war begun; there are no such things as consulting one's neighbours, forming alliances, issuing manifestoes, or summoning all the diplomatists of the continent to a formal conference; there is no flourish of trumpets to start with, or, rather, there are any number of flourishes of any number of trumpets; they fight, pillage, burn, kill, and eat—*voila tout.* In a few weeks the war is over; it is true that it breaks out afresh, but that happens in Europe also, as has been seen often enough and may be seen again any day.

The next thing we did was to take stock of our provisions, merchandise, and ammunition. Alas! The number of articles for exchange was sadly diminished; the rolls of iron wire, which our bearers had so laboriously struggled under in days gone by, were trifles now, a source of rejoicing to them, at any rate. Our cotton goods, once sufficient to clothe a whole tribe, would now scarcely serve to cover Munza's

ex-wives, even if they were to take it into their heads to observe a little decency, an extravagance for which we are not likely to give them credit. We had gold and silver, indeed, but in a country where gold is held in small esteem, a sovereign would not buy a fowl. As for our drafts and bank notes, I think I can picture to myself the dismay of a negro, asked to part with a banana for a fifty pound note. But in spite of the state of poverty to which we are reduced, we shall manage, if we are not robbed of our last resources, to get to the end of our journey without begging by the road side.

Our ammunition is, thank goodness, plentiful. The Nubians have not wasted over-much powder in saluting the various villages we have passed through, and the shooting matches, necessary for the training of the men, and our expeditions after elephants, antelopes, and other game, do not appear to have made any excessive inroad on the number of our cartridges.

After having thus taken stock of things, we turned our attention to persons. Our escort is, as I have already said, far from being complete, but we can thoroughly rely on the men who are left. Our relative positions have changed, for, thanks to the King, we could, in case of need, do without their services altogether, whilst they, on the other hand, would never be able, without our help, to make their way back to their own country. In dread, therefore, of

being left to themselves in the heart of the Monbuttoo country, they are obedient to a degree.

The servants and bearers share the feelings of the soldiers, and punishments are now unknown amongst us. If any one shows a sign of disobedience, he is threatened with expulsion from the camp, and on this hint he becomes amiable at once, and, in the matter of politeness, could give points to the most polished of Europeans. All the Monbuttoos, moreover, are fully cognizant of the fact that we are the friends of a very powerful monarch, and that a word from us would bring their heads off. When we left Khartoum we were simple travellers, to be abandoned, perhaps, as others have been ; now we are looked upon as great chiefs, sultans, monarchs on leave in central Africa.

All things considered, we have no cause for complaint, and we may, without being accused of excessive rashness, take our flight to regions as yet unexplored.

Whilst masters and servants were striking the balance of the caravan, Joseph, who has his moments of inspiration, managed to discover a last remaining bottle of Jules Mumm, hidden away under the straw in a case thought to be empty.

We lost no time in drinking success to our

future enterprise in the sparkling beverage of our beloved France.

About two o'clock in the afternoon, the King sent to request the attendance of de Morin, Delange, and myself, a wish we responded to without delay.

CHAPTER XLII.

When we reached the environs of the palace, and before going to see Munza, we turned to look at the scene of the great fire of the previous evening.

Where once had stood the dwellings of the royal wives, the harem of Munza, now ashes alone were to be seen. All the huts had vanished without leaving a trace behind, and the splendid trees which lately overshadowed them were reduced to powder. A few gigantic trunks only, spared, though scorched, by the flames, stretched out their sturdy, leafless branches to the sky.

The red clay was overspread by a thick carpet of white cinders, like a clearing covered with snow.

The clouds of smoke, which the wind had not been strong enough to disperse, wreathed themselves in every direction and spread like a mist over the landscape, looking more desolate still by contrast with the surrounding country, resplendent with verdure and light.

Was the mad passion of the African king for Madame de Guéran destined to lead to further destruction? Had Munza, through fear of being ridiculous, sworn to be an object of terror?

We found the King in his armoury, distributing arms to a number of soldiers drawn up in the gardens, and giving orders to his officers. He came towards us as soon as he saw us, and charged Nassar to unfold to us his plans. He intended to march, at the full of the moon, in the direction of the district governed by his brother, Degberra, in order to gain information about the white man, who, subsequently to Schweinfurth, had passed through the country, and on this information would depend his future movements.

He also asked us whether the plan was in accordance with our wishes, to which we replied that it was an excellent one, and that we could wish for no better. At the same time, we could not help admiring the determined character of the man, the energy he displayed when any necessity for it arose, and the promptness with which he laid his plans—all rare qualities in a negro.

In fact, the more we study the Monbuttoo people, the more they seem to differ from the negro race. They are a tribe apart, thrown away in Central Africa, and we can well understand the regret expressed by Schweinfurth at not having been able to push his explorations farther into this region.

In the territory comprised between two degrees of latitude we are sure to meet with strange customs and curious phenomena on the

part of the Monbuttoos. Their country is, in some sort, the border-land of eccentricity.

eply to Munza's enquiry as to what as- ender him in case he should have to fight against powerful tribes, de Morin thought it prudent to say, for all of us, that we should take up arms only if we were attacked personally.

"It is a question," he continued, "of a journey and a peaceful expedition rather than of a war, and you will be pleasing our sister if you fall in with our ideas."

"I would willingly do so," replied Munza, "if I could. But I have frequently waged war against my neighbours, and as soon as they see me advancing with my army, the weak will take to flight after burning their crops, so as to starve me, and the strong will attack me—I must defend myself, and you must help me."

"If you are attacked," said de Morin, "without provocation, we shall consider ourselves as attacked also, and we shall have no hesitation in joining our forces to yours."

"You have in your possession," said the King, "plenty of arms like those you have shown me, those pieces of wood and iron which make thunder, have you not?"

"Yes," answered de Morin, "all my soldiers are so armed."

"You have some to spare, also. Will you lend them to my troops and teach them how to use them? We should be invincible then."

"No," said our friend, boldly; "I will not do that."

"Why?" asked the King, quickly.

"I believe in your good faith; I am sure of you, but I have not the same confidence in your warriors. If you were to die I should find myself at their mercy, and, as they are far more numerous than we are, I wish to retain over them the advantage which my arms give me. Would you like the Sultana—when you were no longer at hand to protect her—to be at the mercy of your troops."

This last argument touched Munza, who appeared to be lost in thought, and said not a word.

But de Morin, who, by his firm, frank manner, his judicious concessions and adroit flattery, was beginning to have as much influence over the King as he had over our escort, thought it wise to add—

"To show you that I do not put you in the same category with your officers, nor with your soldiers, and that I have thorough confidence in you, I concede to you what I have thought it right to refuse to others. I will give you the best rifle I have, and, meanwhile, allow me to present you with a weapon equally formidable. I have no need to be armed whilst in your palace, and under your protection."

So saying, he drew his revolver from his belt and handed it to the King.

Munza could not conceal his delight. He seized the pistol, turned it over and over again;

his hands trembled, his eyes glistened, and the powerful African monarch was a child again; the negro reappeared and asserted his rights.

De Morin took advantage of this unguarded moment to broach, in a very summary manner, a delicate subject. He told the King that the Monbuttoos were reported in the north to eat the enemies they killed in battle, and he added that he wished to spare his sister a sight so odious and repugnant to all white people.

Munza, feeling, perhaps, that he himself was personally guilty of this charge, replied, with some confusion, that it was difficult to expect a sudden transformation in the customs of his subjects, but that he would take good care that the Sultana should be spared any shock to her feelings.

Driven into a corner by de Morin, he confessed that a Monbuttoo soldier did not think himself invulnerable until he had eaten the flesh of one of his foes.

This confession did not surprise us in the least, for Baker states that the soldiers of his personal escort, the Forty Thieves, as he calls them, tried soldiers, brave and semi-civilized, practised the same custom as the Monbuttoos. We could, therefore, neither be astonished nor complain, if in these regions, more barbarous than those bordering on the Nile, we should be called upon to witness scenes of a similar description.

On the contrary, we ought to congratulate ourselves on the precautions taken by Munza to avoid our prejudices being shocked. His soldiers will continue to eat their enemies—that gratification cannot be withheld from them—but they will eat them with closed doors, like discreet and delicate-minded people, who respect the opinions of their neighbours.

Travellers, as a rule, have not been so fortunate. General Baker, whom I have just mentioned, says that he attempted one day to make a negro chief understand the immorality of the slave trade, and that, just as he fondly hoped that he had convinced him, the chief said, abruptly—

"Have you any children?"

"Alas! no," replied Baker. "I have lost them all."

"Well," said the chief, "I have a son, my only child; he is very small and very thin, but with you he will grow fat if you only look at him. You will be able to feed him up to any extent. He is always hungry, eating day and night without ever being satisfied. You can do anything you like with him, provided you fill his stomach. You cannot think what a dear good child he is. Well! I will sell him to you for a molote" (a kind of African shovel).

As regards cannibalism, we have been far more successful. Munza is not convinced, but he does not appear as insensible to our argu-

ments as was the negro chief to those of Baker.

After some further conversation, the King proposed to hold a review of a part of his army. We gladly fell in with the idea, as much from a motive of curiosity, as to ascertain how far we could rely on his troops; and, more important still, to find out whether we could fight them with any chance of success, when the time should come for Munza to express a wish to bring us back to his dominions.

About two thousand men were drawn up on a large parade ground adjoining the palace. The rokko tunics, which I have already described, were their only uniform, their legs, arms, and breasts, daubed with red, black and blue war-paint, being uncovered. The officers were distinguished from the soldiers merely by the plumes of various colours which ornamented their cylindrical head-dresses. They were armed to the teeth; in their girdles were swords with bent blades, axes, knives, and daggers with small grooves to allow the blood to run off; in their right hands a lance or a bow and arrows, and in their left a primitive shield made of wood, about four feet long, and carried by means of a copper handle. This body went though a series of manœuvres, and surprised us by their strict discipline and the precision of their movements

"We should have to keep these men at a

distance with our rifles," said de Morin to me, in an undertone. "Their swords, axes and daggers are formidable weapons, and would be very dangerous at close quarters. But their arrows, though, as you see, they carry for about three hundred paces, are so light and describe so extensive a curve, that they would only hit the mark by accident."

The review was brought to a close by a charge of the whole line; all the soldiers, after having withdrawn for about a hundred yards, came on towards us, some brandishing their axes, others with lance in rest, whilst the remainder drew their bows to their full stretch and aimed their arrows at us. The whole force yelled horribly, put on their fiercest expression, ground their teeth, and appeared both ready and willing to eat us. Without any feeling of cowardice, or being over-timid, we might very easily have believed that these men were bent on our destruction. However, none of us quailed, for, even if we had not known that the whole affair was merely a review, our European pride would have prevented our showing, in the sight of these savages, the slightest symptom of fear.

The King had stationed himself at some distance from us, with the undoubted object of increasing our fears and letting us think that he had let his army loose upon us. He scanned us closely, and must have been quite satisfied with our bearing. If his idea was to put us to

the test, he could now rest assured that his new allies were not easily to be frightened.

Just as the warriors were close upon us, he threw himself in front of us, and at once every bow, arrow and lance was lowered; the troops halted as if they were so many automatons, saluted the King, and, wheeling about, retired to their original position.

July 6, 1873.—The army is at this moment moving off. The people have collected from all quarters to see it pass, and applaud. The women are crying, the drums and trumpets are dinning away in their most ear-splitting fashion, and the soldiers of our escort are firing a *feu de joie*. We get on our horses, and give the word to our caravan to follow the army.

We are at last fairly bound for the unknown!

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"The work is more effective and executed with greater neatness and mastery over detail than it would, in all probability, have been in an English novel of the same calibre. The mystery that surrounds the murder of the Paris Stockbroker, MAURICE VIDAL, in his own house, in the Rue de la Paix, is well sustained, and the plot laid between his young widow and the brilliant detective VIBART, to whom his profession is a branch of high art, and who is altogether to the English detective what the Danube is to the Thames, to bring home the guilt to the man whom they both suspect is ingenious and stirring."—*Graphic.*

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